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p. 165 **Editorial Searching for Roots**

Four hundred years ago the Jesuit Matteo Ricci began his missionary career in China. He is best remembered for his accommodating attitude to ancestor practices. Later his views were vigorously opposed by the Dominican and Franciscan missionaries who won the support of Rome; a position that was upheld until modified by Pius XII in 1939. Early in the Protestant missionary era in China, William Martin and Hudson Taylor advocated radically different approaches to the problem. The debate still continues. At the recent evangelical consultation on A Christian Response to Ancestor Practices, though all agreed ancestor worship was contrary to Scripture, there were sharp differences of opinion on the boundary between filial piety and ancestor practices. Some argued for viable functional substitutes, others rejected all forms of the traditions including the keeping of genealogies and tomb sweeping ceremonies.

Idolatry takes subtle forms and its symbols differ from culture to culture. For some it is bowing before the photo of a deceased mother, for others it may be saluting the national flag. Boasting of church statistics, evangelism campaign successes or even missionary budgets may be just as much idolatrous as burning incense before the family shrine—if it means glorifying man rather than God. Idolatry begins in the heart, the practices are only the symptoms. The desire to be independent of God and attempts to manipulate Him is in the root of all idolatrous sin.

Searching for culture roots may be a blessing or a curse; it depends on the motives. Paul confessed to the Corinthian church ‘I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom but on God’s power’. [1 Cor. 2:3–5](#). Symbols need careful explanation for, as with Biblical parables, they either hide the truth to those whose minds are hardened or reveal it to those who have ears to hear. Only those, who with mind and heart follow Christ in the way of the Cross, will have the wisdom to distinguish between true and false practices and the power to obey the Spirit’s guidance even when it is contrary to popular opinion.

Several articles in this issue of ERT speak to aspects of this problem. p. 166

Dare We Re-Interpret Genesis?

David C. C. Watson

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With this issue of ERT we begin a new section dedicated to exegesis and interpretation of Scripture. We invite our readers to submit or to recommend expository sermons or articles dealing with important issues of interpretation. In this article the author challenges the non-literal interpretation of [Genesis 1–11](#).

(Editors)

‘Tracing the future of the Universe from the present onward is not nearly so hard [as tracing the past]: we do not need any new way of looking at the world. All that we really need to plot out our future are a few good measurements’.

James S. Trefil, *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 1983

So runs a recent challenge from the humanist camp. Do you see what has happened? Completely self-assured about their (Big Bang) theory of the world’s beginning, they now assert with equal intrepidity their predictions about the world’s end. God is not invited or involved—even as spectator! But at least they are logical and consistent: the godless overture is matched with a godless finale. A much stranger phenomenon today is Christians who profess to believe what God says about the end of the world (Last Judgement, Heaven, etc.), but at the same time refuse to accept what He has said about its beginning.

HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

Before we take a closer look at the *Guideposts* article (CT, October 1982) it may be well to remind ourselves that re-interpretation of Scripture is an old game. ‘Full well you reject the commandment of God that you may keep your own tradition ... you hold the tradition of men ... making the word of God of none effect through your tradition which you have handed down ...’ ([Mark 7](#)). We find this attitude of Christ to the Old Testament uniformly consistent throughout his ministry. In his answers to the devil, to enquirers about divorce, about the sabbath, about eternal life, and on a dozen other occasions, *He never re-interpreted* Scripture. He simply quoted the words as being in themselves perspicuous, intelligible, and meaningful, in the plain sense of common speech. Why did this offend the Pharisees? They were certainly fundamentalists. They believed in an inerrant Book. But they had *re-interpreted* the words to suit their own life-style. **P. 167**

As we move on through the New Testament we find again and again a similar resistance to newtruth, or, rather, to old truths re-discovered. ‘O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!’ Notice that the Lord did not blame them for failing to understand dark and difficult passages. He did blame them for failing to believe prophecies like (presumably) [Isaiah 53](#), where the sufferings of Christ are clearly foretold. Once again, Bible-believers were blind to Bible truth because of the current philosophy—in this case, expectation of a conquering Messiah.

We can follow the same theme through Church History. As has often been pointed out, the Pope believed 95% of what Martin Luther believed, including the plenary inspiration and authority of the Bible, and ‘the just shall live by faith’. But the schoolmen had *re-interpreted* Paul’s words to fit in with the current medieval philosophy and ecclesiastical system. It was ‘all a matter of interpretation’. So it was in the days of John Wesley. Anglican prelates disapproved of his open-air preaching, in spite of obvious precedents in the Acts of the Apostles. Baptist elders tried to discourage Carey: ‘God can take care of the heathen without your help, Master William!’—in spite of [Mark 16:15](#). They *re-interpreted* Christ’s command to suit the laissez-faire philosophy of 18th century England. When George Müller and Hudson Taylor affirmed that it was possible for Christian work to be supported ‘by prayer alone to God alone’, Christian businessmen laughed them to scorn: ‘Thinks he can live on thin air!’ The promises had always been right there in [Matthew 6](#), but ‘little faith’ had *re-interpreted* them as being contrary to experience.

So we see that pioneers of spiritual truth are often ridiculed in their own generation. Uncomfortable doctrines are jettisoned to prevent their rocking the boat. Outward profession of conformity to Scripture is retained even when practice and teaching differ widely from its pattern. And not infrequently there is heavy reliance on *tradition*: ‘Old So-

and-So was a great man of God and he believed this (or acted thus), so it must be OK for us too!' We are reminded of Kipling's brilliant satire—*The Disciple*:

He that hath a gospel
For all earth to own—
Though he etch it on the steel,
Or carve it on the stone—
Not to be misdoubted
Through the after-days—
It is his Disciple
Shall read it many ways. p. 168

Yes, the Fourth Commandment was indeed carved on stone; but 20th century disciples have read *it many ways*.

ORIGINS OF THE NON-LITERAL INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS 1-11

Lord Macaulay writes of John Milton: 'His attacks were directed against those deeply-seated errors on which almost all abuses are founded: the servile worship of eminent men and the irrational dread of innovation'.

The author of *Guideposts* leans heavily on eminent men: Augustine of Hippo, J. I. Packer, and Francis Schaeffer. Let us first study his remarks about Augustine: '... the ancient theologian Augustine argued that the biblical author structured the passage [Genesis One] as a literary device ...' The picture here presented to the unwary layman is of a learned Father sitting down to write his Commentary on Genesis just as Calvin and Luther did twelve centuries later, and 'arguing' that his own interpretation is correct. This picture is wholly imaginary. In his *Confessions* Books XI, XII and XIII, where Augustine deals with Genesis One, he is not arguing with anyone. Rather, he is *meditating*, in fact the whole passage is an extended prayer to God. In no sense is he setting out his own view as opposed to someone else's. Nor does the word 'structure' or the phrase 'literary device' appear. What he does is *allegorize* the whole chapter, discovering esoteric meanings that (perhaps) no one else ever thought of. Consider the following equations:

The firmament is allegorized into the Bible

waters above the firmament	=	angels
clouds	=	preachers
sea	=	unbelievers
dry land	=	believers
bringing forth fruit	=	works of mercy
stars	=	saints (in various grades of light!)

sacraments	=	fishes
miracles	=	whales

Luther comments: 'Augustine resorts to extraordinary trifling in his treatment of the six days', and some of us may be inclined to agree. Also, Augustine knew hardly a word of Hebrew and was no Greek scholar. As anchor-man in the non-literal team, he is hopelessly light-weight.

Dr. J. I. Packer is a fine theologian but his theological outlook has been strongly influenced by the British Inter-Varsity Fellowship, who have been theistic evolutionists for upwards of fifty years. Moreover he [p. 169](#) is a great admirer of Benjamin Warfield, who in turn relied on W. H. Green of Princeton for his non-literal interpretation of [Genesis 5](#) & 11. Most frequently quoted is Warfield's statement: 'The question of the antiquity of man has of itself no theological significance ... the Bible does not assign a brief span to human history'. This saying has practically become an evangelical *tradition* over the past hundred years. But is it true? What Green and Warfield seem to have overlooked is that the *veracity of God* is a matter of profound theological significance.

Theologically speaking it is a matter of entire indifference whether Christ rose from the dead on the third day or the 33rd or after three years. Even if it were three years, not one word of Paul's letter to the Romans would have to be changed. But God chose to do it on the third (literal) day, and every reference in the Gospels to Christ's resurrection includes the phrase 'after three days' or 'on the third day', or carefully specifies that only one day, the sabbath, intervened between His death and rising again. Why? Because God knows that we require every possible assurance and re-assurance to faith. And *details* of time and place are what make a story interesting and memorable. Not otherwise is it with the creation history and genealogies. Theologically it may be a matter of no significance whether Adam was created 6000 years ago or six million, whether the universe was made in six days or sixty billion years, but the veracity of God cannot be so easily dismissed—and by all the laws of language it is certain that Genesis tells of a six-day creation some 6000 years ago. There is as little reason to doubt the six days of Genesis as to doubt the Three Days of the Gospels. We shall now call witnesses to show that this has been the view of the greatest scholars, ancient and modern, for 1900 years.

SUPPORTERS OF THE LITERAL INTERPRETATION

Flavius Josephus, a Jew of the 1st century AD, was reckoned by Scaliger, the great Reformation scholar, to be a better historian than all the Greek and Roman writers put together. He certainly had unequalled opportunities of investigating and understanding the culture and traditions of his own people. How does he handle the early chapters of Genesis?

(1) 'Moses says that in *just* six days the world and all that is therein was made ... Moreover Moses, *after* the seventh day was over, begins to talk philosophically ...'. In other words, Josephus is saying that Chapter 2 may be a bit mysterious, but in Chapter One there is no hint of any mystery at all. He obviously takes the days as literal. [p. 170](#)

(2) 'The sacred books contain the history of 5000 years ...'.

This is conclusive evidence that the Jews of Josephus' day *added up* the figures in [Genesis 5](#) & [11](#) to make a chronology. To make assurance doubly sure, he later states: '...

this flood began 2656 years from the first man, Adam.’ (Both computations are based on the LXX text).

What C. S. Lewis has so trenchantly written about critics of the New Testament, surely applies no less to re-interpreters of the Old:

‘The idea that any man or writer should be opaque to those who lived in the same culture, spoke the same language, shared the same habitual imagery and unconscious assumptions, and yet be transparent to those who have none of these advantages, is in my opinion preposterous. There is an *a priori* improbability in it which almost no argument and no evidence could counterbalance’. In other words, it seems unlikely that English-speaking Americans in the 20th century will understand Moses better than a Hebrew-and-Greek-speaking Jew of the 1st century AD.

St. Ambrose (d.397 AD) was no more infallible than any of the Church Fathers, but his treatment of Genesis One is grammatical and objective:

‘In notable fashion has Scripture spoken of “one day”, not “the first day” ... Scripture established a law that 24 hours, including both day and night, should be given the name of “day” only, as if one were to say that the length of one day is 24 hours in extent’.

Nobody, I think, disputes that the Reformers accepted Genesis as literal truth, but two brief quotations may be useful. Calvin: ‘God himself took the space of six days, for the purpose of accommodating his works to the capacity of men’. Luther: ‘We know from Moses that the world was not in existence before 6000 years ago’.

MODERN SCHOLARS

James Barr, Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture in Oxford University, ridicules the non-literal interpretation espoused by the Inter-Varsity Press: ‘... the biblical material is twisted to fit the various theories that can bring it into accord with science. In fact *the only natural exegesis* [of Genesis One] *is a literal one*, in the sense that this is what the author meant ... he was deeply interested in chronology and calendar’ (our emphasis).

Samuel R. Driver, Professor of Hebrew at Oxford University, published his commentary on Genesis in 1904 and it is still a standard work of reference. ‘There is little doubt that the writer meant “days” in the literal sense, and that Pearson was right when he inferred from the [p. 171](#) chapter that the world was represented as created “6000 or, at farthest, 7000 years” from the 17th century AD’. The same interpretation is maintained by Keil and Delitzsch, Gerhard von Rad, and (so far as I am aware) by every major commentary on Genesis. In fact we have never heard of any Professor of Hebrew in any of the world’s great Universities who believes that the original writer did not intend his words to be taken literally. Let the Interpreter’s Commentary speak for them all:

‘There can be no question but that by DAY the author meant just what we mean—the time required for one revolution of the earth on its axis. Had he meant aeon he would certainly, in view of his fondness for great numbers, have stated the number of millenniums each period embraced’.

Finally, Dr. John C. Whitcomb has pointed out that a close parallel to Genesis One can be found in [Numbers 7](#). No expositor would dare to affirm that the extended and metaphorical use of ‘day’ in [7:84](#) negates the literal 24-hour days of vv.[12](#), [18](#), [24](#) etc. No more should any expositor try to maintain that the extended and metaphorical use of ‘day’ in [Gen. 2:4](#) negates the literal days of chapter One.

FRANCIS SCHAEFFER

The last of CT's 'eminent men' is Dr. Francis Schaeffer. We too admire his versatility and outstanding achievements, but as a Hebrew scholar he cannot be compared with Barr and Driver, let alone with Calvin and Luther. Let us glance briefly at his objection to the literal interpretation: '... the Bible never uses these early genealogies as a chronology. It never adds up these numbers for dating'.

This seems to us a perfect example of begging the question, because the figures *are* a chronology. Otherwise no conceivable purpose can be adduced for noting the age of each father at the birth of his son (especially in ch.11, where the 'begetting ages' are quite normal by modern standards, mostly in the 30s). Why should Moses do for us what we can do for ourselves?' Similarly Moses does not in ch.11 add up the total life-span of each patriarch, as he did in ch.5. Does this mean that (e.g.) Shelah did *not* live to be 433? Obviously he did; but Moses does not waste words telling us the obvious, because the principle of addition had already been established in ch.5. Also, Moses does not tell us the age of Jacob at the birth of Joseph, but he very neatly works it into the story (41:46; 45:6; [47:9](#)) so that by simple addition and subtraction we find it to be 91. *We are expected to do the sum for ourselves*. There is no reason to doubt that Moses was working on [p. 172](#) exactly the same principle when he left the totals un-added in chs.5 & 11. So we conclude that Dr. Schaeffer's objection is invalid. In the Bible long dates ([Exodus 12](#), [1 Kings 6](#)) are given *only* when there is no other way of computing the total.

ADAM 100,000 BC?

There are, by the way, a number of other problems attached to the 100,000 year theory:

- (1) God condemned Adam to eat BREAD, and archaeology tells us that wheat appeared only 6000–7000 years ago.
- (2) Cain built a CITY, and archaeology knows nothing of city-building before 7000 BC.
- (3) What was God doing for 100,000 years while the human race murdered and plundered and raped and tortured and wallowed in every kind of abominable bestiality? It is hard enough to 'justify the ways of God to man' on the assumption that He waited 4000 years before sending a Saviour. To explain a delay of 100,000 years is, we opine, absolutely impossible.

THE LENGTH OF THE SIXTH DAY

Isn't it interesting that no Bible expositor before Darwin had any problems with the sixth day? But now we are told: 'Clearly the author is indicating that the sixth day extended over quite a period of time'. We beg to differ. How long does it take God to plant a garden? Not longer, I think, than the time it has taken you to read the question. How long did God need to create Adam? Five seconds, perhaps? And how many pairs of animals did Adam have to see before he felt his own need of a mate? Ten—twenty—fifty? Surely not more than fifty—and one can see fifty pairs of animals in a couple of hours at any fair-sized zoo. Naming them would be no problem for a man with a perfect mind and a Godgiven language. But what about Eve? Surely that operation took a long time? One pictures—subconsciously—angel nurses scrubbing Adam's chest, white-robed cherubim administering anaesthetic, and the long wait that often precedes surgery in a modern hospital. All pure fantasy! Almighty God, we suggest, did not need ten minutes to remove Adam's rib and build it into a woman. As for Adam's 'Now—at last!'—the expression of joy and surprise is perfectly natural and reasonable when we ponder the fact that he had never seen another human, let alone a beautiful woman (Luther was so sure of the Sixth

Day being completed by the first 'Friday' that he confidently assigns the Fall to the first Sabbath). No—the 'long-sixth-day' objection is another 'deeply-seated error', a desperately weak argument cobbled together to [P. 173](#) escape the inescapable confrontation of [Exodus 20](#) and [31](#). 'Ye do err, not knowing ... the power of God'.

THE FLOOD IGNORED

It is puzzling to find in *Guideposts* no reference to Noah's flood—puzzling because this is *the* real point at issue. If the fossils were caused by one colossal deluge, then there never was a need for the Gap Theory or any of the other intellectual contortions devised by evangelical concordists over the last 120 years. (We suggest the time has come for CT to review Dillow's impressive book *The Waters Above*, Moody 1981/2, which reinforces with massive new evidence Whitcomb & Morris' *Genesis Flood*). There may be problems connected with this Bible history (e.g. How did the marsupials reach Australia?) but these are as nothing compared with the problem of explaining away the physical evidence *for* a universal flood.

It is also fair to say that if [Genesis 6–9](#) had been written in any book other than the Bible, no one would have doubted that the writer meant to convey the idea of a world-wide deluge. For example, compare the Latin poet Ovid's account of the same event: 'Wherever old Ocean roars around the earth, I must destroy the race of men ...' says Jupiter. 'He preferred to destroy the human race beneath the waves ... and now the sea and land have no distinction. All is sea, and a sea without a shore ... Here (on Mount Parnassus, 8000 feet) Deucalion and his wife had come to land—for the sea had covered all things else (Deucalion addresses his wife) 'O only woman left on earth ... we two are the only survivors, the sea holds all the rest'. Any scholar who dared to suggest that Ovid did *not* intend to depict a universal flood, would be laughed out of court. Now—the language of [Genesis 6–9](#) is at least as unambiguous and comprehensive as Ovid's, but evangelical concordists have succeeded in throwing an aura of mystery round the Bible story so that 'no one can be quite sure what it means'. Alas for Christendom!

It is his Disciple
Who shall tell us how
Much the Master would have scrapped
Had he lived till now ...
Amplify distinctions,
Rationalize the claim;
Preaching that the Master
Would have done the same.

On the contrary, we believe that GOD is the greatest communicator of [p. 174](#) all time. When He planned his revelation to mankind, He had at his disposal all the words of all the languages of every tribe and nation. How could He have failed to communicate what He really meant—when a pagan poet succeeded?

TOO COMPLICATED

Our final objection to the Non-Literal Theory (NLT) is that it is far too complicated. Every teacher knows that you begin with the simple and move on the complex. This principle can be clearly seen in the Bible, too. Prose in Samuel and Kings leads on to poetry in the Psalms, philosophy in Ecclesiastes, prophecy in Isaiah and finally difficult passages in Ezekiel and Daniel. But the non-literal school would have us believe that right at the

beginning of his revelation God has placed a conundrum as hard to solve as any in the whole Bible. Anyone who has tried to teach the elements of Christianity to primitive or illiterate people will recognize the utter impossibility of explaining to them why God's first words should be 'a *subtle, highly sophisticated modification of an ancient Mesopotamian literary device*' (R. Youngblood) rather than plain statements of fact, easily intelligible in every language to all peoples—as the pioneer missionaries believed. The Literary Framework Hypothesis is a house of cards carefully constructed by academics in the airless atmosphere and artificial light of a theological library. We need to open the windows and allow a good strong blast of common sense to blow it down. And what about children? Of all books in the Bible, Genesis is pre-eminently the children's book. Who can doubt but that these fascinating stories were designed by God to allure the sweet innocence of childhood and lead us gently to faith in Christ? ('from a *babe* thou hast known the Holy Scriptures', writes Paul to Timothy). But now, inevitably, questions will be asked:

'Dad, did God *really* make everything in six days?'

'Mom, did the ark *really* hold every kind of animal?'

—and parents who follow the NLT with one accord begin to make excuse:

'Well, no, not really, darling. You see, the scientists say ...'

In view of Christ's solemn words about causing little ones to stumble, I would not like to stand in the shoes of anyone who teaches a child that in the A-B-C book of religion, God does not mean what He says.

AN APPEAL

Finally, a personal appeal to 'progressive creationists'. 'If you can't **P. 175** beat 'em, join 'em', is good advice. The past twenty years have seen a mighty movement 'Back to the Bible', following the exposure of mega-evolution as a mega-lie, and the discovery of many new facts supporting creationism. Would it not be wise to admit, now, that the pioneers (Whitcomb and Morris) were right after all? Non-literalist commentaries on Genesis are the laughing-stock of the world, and no amount of special pleading or re-interpretation is ever going to persuade ordinary people that Moses did not teach a literal six-day creation, a Young Earth, and a universal flood. 'Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould', as did the medieval church, as did William Carey's obstructors, and Hudson Taylor's. Martin Luther's challenge of 500 years ago is right up to date: 'If I profess with the loudest voice every Bible doctrine *except that one truth* which Satan is attacking today, I am no soldier of Jesus Christ'. You don't have to be a reader of the *Smithsonian* to know which Bible truths are under special attack today. Noah's flood is a 'fairy tale'; Archbishop Ussher is a figure of fun; and six-day creation is a 'prescientific myth'. That is why God is calling for *real* disciples who will *not* 'amplify distinctions' or 'rationalize the claim', but will stand up and tell the world that He means just what He says in [Genesis 1-11](#). The scientific establishment will never take seriously the Christian doctrine of Last Things until they see that Christians take seriously the Bible doctrine of First Things. Unbelievers will recognize their dreams of the future as wholly delusive only when they are shown that their picture of the past is completely chimerical.

'When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. And the men of Israel pursued ...' As Norman Macbeth recently said, it is a time for funerals—of evolutionary hypotheses. The top Philistines know well that their champion (Darwin) is dead. Isn't it time for all true-hearted soldiers to join in the pursuit?

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Genesis and Evolution

Nigel M. de S. Cameron

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THE BACKGROUND

A recent issue of *The Times* newspaper of London carried lengthy letters from two well-known evangelical scientists on the question of evolution. One wrote disparagingly of the creationists as believing in 'Paley's divine Watchmaker who retired above the bright blue sky after a week of frenzied activity in 4004 BC'. The other, who happens to be the President of the Biblical Creation Society,¹ suggested that the creationist view had much to commend it, particularly in the light of recent doubt expressed by the scientific community in its traditional belief in evolution.²

What are we to make of this debate? In the USA for many years now creationism has been gathering in strength, and recently mounting disquiet in scientific circles the world over as to the adequacy of neo-Darwinism in purely scientific terms has lent new credence to traditional creationist positions. For example, Stephen Jan Gould of Harvard has developed a theory of 'punctuated equilibrium' which, although thoroughly evolutionary (and Gould is a vigorous opponent of creationism), accepts that the traditional reading of the fossil record as indicating gradual evolutionary change may no longer be sustained. Gould's answer, which has gained increasing acceptance among his professional colleagues, is to suggest an evolution that proceeds by relatively sudden 'jumps' rather than the slow processes of (neo-) Darwinian orthodoxy. Creationists, of course, have maintained all along that the fossil record does not support gradual change.³ In Britain considerable controversy has been generated within the scientific community by an exhibition mounted at the British Museum (Natural History) in London which suggested that evolution was only *one way* of explaining the biological order. It has been motivated by 'cladism', which is a new and complex way of categorizing organisms, and whose supporters are prepared to be agnostic about the origins of living things since they do not believe the theory of evolution to be any help to them in their work of taxonomy. A

¹ The Biblical Creation Society is one of the British groupings of Christians opposed to the theology of evolution. It publishes *Biblical Creation* (a journal for students and others) and *Rainbow* (a popular broadsheet), as well as monograph series and various pamphlets. Information may be obtained from the Secretary, 51 Cloan Crescent, Bishopbriggs, Glasgow G64 2HN Scotland.

² *The Times*, London, 16 December 1981. The correspondents cited are, respectively, Prof. R. J. Berry and Prof. E. H. Andrews.

³ See, e.g., Duane Gish, *Evolution: the Fossils say No!* (San Diego, 1974).

vigorous controversy has [p. 177](#) raged in scientific journals in Britain during 1981 on account of this exhibition, and it has naturally brought creationists to the fore.⁴ One further factor may be mentioned, again by way of illustration. Sir Fred Hoyle and Professor Chandra Wickramasinghe, the British astronomers, have published a remarkable book entitled *Evolution from Space*⁵ which concludes that there must be an intelligence behind evolution, as it *could* not (in mathematical terms) have happened on its own. Wickramasinghe was criticized for testifying at the Arkansas case in the USA, in which judgment was given in January of this year, where a state law insisting on the teaching of both theories (creation and evolution) in schools was struck down as violating the church-state separation principle of the US Constitution.

Of course, in all this it must be said that the great majority of scientists remain convinced of evolution. But their confidence in the traditional understanding of *how it happened* has been shaken. Some of the old creationist contentions (on matters like reading of the fossil record) have been vindicated, to a significant degree, in the new theories vying to succeed neo-Darwinism. For better or for worse, creationism has found itself on the agenda of public debate.

THE DIFFERING CHRISTIAN POSITIONS

There are problems in the very definition of terms. 'Creationists' are so called because they believe in creation rather than evolution. But it may be very properly objected that Christians who believe in evolution believe in creation as well. 'Theistic evolution' is an option taken by many evangelicals who believe that creation was brought about, in part at least, by means of organic evolution. They maintain that the debate is not 'Creation v. Evolution', but between believers in creation working through evolution, and believers in creation who for some reason reject evolution as the *modus operandi*. Christians are all, necessarily, 'creationists'.

In fact at this point a whole spectrum of possible options is opened up, and most possible positions find actual proponents within the camp of evangelical belief. On the 'creationist' side, since the publication twenty years ago of Whitcomb and Morris' *The Genesis Flood* there has been an increasingly strong tide of 'young earth' opinion, [p. 178](#) holding to a date of somewhere in the region of 10 or 20,000 BC for the creation of the world. Whitcomb and Morris sought to re-establish what had been known as flood geology, a revised version of the 'catastrophism' which reigned in historical geology prior to the work of Lyell in the 1830s.⁶ Not all, however, go along with their stress on the Noahic flood as a primary geology agent, responsible for most of the fossil strata. Another position, fathered in the early days of geological controversy well before Darwin, is that of the 'gap theory'. A lengthy time-gap is posited between [Genesis 1:1](#) and [1:2](#), long enough for the depositing of the fossils and much else besides, such that what follows is in effect an account not of creation but of *re-creation*. This theory had a wide following in an earlier generation, but today is in decline. Its classic expression was in G. H. Pember's *Earth's*

⁴ For a useful summary of this debate which one of the chief evolutionists involved acknowledged to be fair, see D. Tyler, 'Establishment Science and the British Museum', in *Biblical Creation* 3: 10, pp.68-75. The journal *Nature*, Tyler notes, carried three editorials and over thirty letters on the subject, beginning on 20 November 1980.

⁵ London, 1981.

⁶ C. C. Gillispie's *Genesis and Geology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951) charts the course of the early nineteenth-century debates.

Earliest Ages (New York, 1876). Others wish to preserve man as a special creation without at the same time overthrowing historical geology. One such is Davis Young's *Creation and the Flood* (Grand Rapids, 1977).

A typical exposition of 'theistic evolution' is that of Victor Pearce in his *Who was Adam?* Pearce accepts both the long age of the earth and the evolutionary origin of man, seeking a place for 'Adam' as New Stone Age man. He reads the six days of [Genesis 1](#) as ages in the history of the earth, and remarks that thus understood they broadly follow the ages of historical geology. He understands the Genesis narrative therefore to be compatible with the consensus of modern scientific thought. Another writer in the same school makes the 'suggestion' that 'when God made man in His own image, what He did was to stamp His own likeness or one of the many "hominids" which appear to have been living at the time'.⁷ That is to say, something happened to transform a 'hominid' (who was not human, in the sense of not possessing the divine image) into a 'man'; and that something was the creative act of God.

Two different fundamental positions lie behind these particular attempts to harmonize Scripture and science, and for that reason although one could wish for a more precise vocabulary the terms 'creation' and 'evolution' do have definite *loci* despite the variety of opinion which they encompass. Evangelical evolutionists accept the infallible authority of Scripture, as do creationists. But they also believe that there is no contradiction between such an acceptance and belief in the theories that are the consensus of modern scientific thinking [p. 179](#) about the origin of man and the world. They consider that it is not necessary to interpret Scripture in a manner which would call evolution in question. They believe that Genesis does not teach 'science' but rather focuses on the Creator and the fact of his having created; the 'how' questions which scientists are trained to ask are left undiscussed in the narrative. Creationists, by contrast, find themselves Compelled by the statements in the early chapters of Genesis radically to disagree with the modern scientific consensus. On the one hand, Genesis teaches that human death had its origin in human sin (and [Romans 5](#), for instance, supports such a reading), that God made a first couple directly and without intermediate agency, that the original world was perfect and without the results of sin which have since overrun it; and, on the other, evolution is a necessary element in secular man's self-understanding, bound up with his refusal to acknowledge God as his Creator. We must, they conclude, strike out afresh and seek an understanding of the data of science which is faithful to this biblical view of things. And they point to the number of very distinguished men of science who stand with them.

Creationists are keen to argue that, though they may end up taking 'literal' positions on matters like the 'days' of [Genesis 1](#), their rejection of evolution does not *require* such readings. Further, they maintain that they are faithful to the intentions of the original authors of Scripture, whereas modern evangelical evolutionists have tended to override original intentions and to treat the Genesis narratives as mythical, i.e. as not referring to real events in this world of time and space. On the other hand it is contended that we must be wary of imposing 'literal' or any other categories of interpretation upon Scripture, since all kinds of literature are contained within the canon and used there by the Spirit of God.⁸

⁷ John Stott, cited in C. Chapman, *Christianity on Trial*, 2 (Berkhamsted, 1974), p.115.

⁸ Both sides of the argument featured in *Themelios* 4:1 (September 1978) where Noel Weekes, 'The Hermeneutical Problem of [Genesis 1–11](#)' and Paul Helm, 'Arguing about Origins', are both worth consulting for concise statements.

ISSUES ARISING

A number of issues arise out of this debate. First, *what is the status of Holy Scripture?* This is, of course, itself hotly debated. Those who admit there to be actual *errors* in the Bible presumably find no difficulty in rejecting elements in Genesis with which they may disagree. The question is whether, given a belief in a fully *infallible* Scripture, Genesis can be shown to be in harmony with evolution and consensus historical geology. Those who believe in infallibility must in principle **P. 180** admit that Scripture *might* disagree with what most scientists think, and that if that were the case they would be bound by its teaching. That much must be common ground among orthodox Christians.

Secondly we face the distinct question, *what is the teaching of Holy Scripture?* It is, presumably, common ground that the principle focus of the teaching of the Bible lies in what we may ascertain of the intentions of the original (human) author of any given book. What he meant to say, using whatever literary form he chose, is what the Bible says and therefore what God says. We need to use all possible literary and linguistic tools to obtain as near an understanding as possible of what the writer(s) of Genesis wished to purvey. We must avoid the twin dangers of permitting scientific orthodoxy or a certain theological tradition to determine our reading of Holy Scripture. How Genesis is understood elsewhere in Scripture will weigh heavily with us in our reading of it, but we must be wary, in turn, of reading back traditional understandings into these other texts. The Christian is of course committed to the integrity of scientific and theological endeavour. We must expect both these fields of study to yield true results and results that can be harmonized with each other. We must never turn our backs upon facts, biblical or scientific. The essential principle is that we must distinguish what are facts and what are impositions upon them that they do not *require*. There can ultimately be no difference between God's revelation in Scripture and the facts of his creation.

Thirdly we must ask ourselves about the status and *significance of the contending theories today*. For example, are the scientific credentials of evolution as valid as most of us have been led to believe?⁹ Is evolution integral to secular man's understanding of himself and his world? If that is true, it does not make it wrong, but it raises a questionmark against the Christian acceptance of it. By the same token, it has been asked, what is the connection between creationism in the USA and right-wing politics? What is its connection with the anti-science movement of our times which is tied up with a general anti-intellectualism? We must face these questions, whatever their answers may be. Not that any such connection would make either theory wrong. It would, however, suggest that the 'objectivity' so often claimed for scientific theories needs to be understood alongside the subjective **p. 181** experience of the scientists who hold these theories. Man is an irreducibly religious being, and all his thoughts and actions have religious implications.

The interpretation of Scripture in an area of historical and contemporary disagreement is no easy task. We must strip away both our own pre-suppositions and those of our culture, and endeavour to listen to the words of revelation afresh, if we are to be ruled by the Scripture and not to impose ourselves and our preferences upon it. The danger of hearing only what we wish to hear, or what is convenient and acceptable, is ever real. At the same time, it is needful for Christians who differ about controversial questions

⁹ There has been much discussion of the philosopher of science Karl Popper's suggestion that because evolution deals with something we cannot repeat, it cannot properly be called a 'theory' at all. K. A. Kerkut's *Implications of Evolution* (London, 1961) questions many of the assumptions evolutionists tend to make (from a non-Christian perspective). E. H. Andrews' booklet *Is Evolution Scientific?* sets out a more popular (and creationist) assessment of the question (Welwyn, 1979).

to do so in a spirit of brotherhood and mutual tolerance; but these matters will not be decided by their being ignored, and their implications are such that we can hardly leave them unresolved. Some reading for those who would pursue them further is suggested below.

FURTHER READING

For a general and informative survey of many of the issues in this and related debates, see Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Exeter, 1955), though especially in his discussion of Creationist geology Ramm is now badly dated.

J. C. Whitcomb and H. M. Morris' *The Genesis Flood* (Philadelphia, 1961) has been referred to above; it is the most significant creationist work of the present generation, though it too is now somewhat dated. Many scientific works have come from creationist pens, including Evan Shute's *Flaws in the Theory of Evolution* (Nutley, N. J., 1961) and a number of books by A. E. Wilder-Smith, especially *Man's Origin, Man's Destiny* (Stuttgart, 1974), *The Basis for a New Biology* (Stuttgart, 1976), and most recently *The Natural Sciences Know Nothing of Evolution* (San Diego, 1981). For a startling attack on evolution from a non-Christian source, Fred Hoyle and C. Wickramasinghe's *Evolution from Space* (London, 1981) is the most recent in a line of questionings from outside of creationism.

On biblical questions, two useful papers are to be found in *In the Beginning ...*, edited by the present writer (Glasgow, 1980), by D. A. Carson ('Adam in the Epistles of Paul') and J. G. McConville ('Interpreting Genesis 1-11'). The *Themelios* article on 'The Hermeneutical Problem of Genesis 1-11' referred to above (in [4:1](#)) briefly sets out the more 'literal' interpretative case. E. H. Andrews usefully discusses exegetical/philosophical issues in his *God, Science and Evolution* (Welwyn, 1980). [p. 182](#)

Theistic evolutionists have been less productive. Commentaries suggest harmonistic readings, e.g. Derek Kidner's *Genesis* in the Tyndale series (London, 1967), pp.26ff. Various volumes on science and faith advert to this debate, e.g. M. A. Jeeves, *The Scientific Enterprise and Christian Faith* (London, 1969), pp.98ff. E. K. Victor Pearce's *Who was Adam?* (Exeter, 1969) gives a fuller discussion. Paul Helm's *Themelios* article referred to above ([4:1](#)) raises some of the methodological and exegetical issues. See also F. Schaeffer's *Genesis in Space and Time* (Illinois, 1972; London, 1973). Books by non-evangelicals are of course legion, with several volumes by I. G. Barbour touching on these questions, the speculative works of Teilhard de Chardin endeavouring to think out the implications of evolution for theology, and studies like John Hick's *Evil and the God of Love* (London, 1966) taking account of evolution in their discussion of related theological issues.

Finally, we may draw attention to two major historical works which set the modern discussion in its context. Reference has already been made to C. C. Gillispie's *Genesis and Geology*, dealing with the pre-Darwinian debates which in some ways were more important than those which Darwin himself initiated; and James R. Moore's *The Post-Darwinian Controversies* (Cambridge, 1979) is a major assessment of the theological response to Darwin (though it is largely uninterested in the vital exegetical questions).

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Torah and Christ On the Use of the Old Testament in the Early Synagogue and in the Early Church

Ole Chr. M. Kvarme

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In this article the author discusses the inescapable link between understanding the OT from the perspective of the Christ-event and its normativity in its entirety as divine revelation and salvation history. The issue of the relationship between the living and the written word is brought out in discussing the significance of Christ in Christianity compared with the Torah in Judaism, namely, in the form of Christ as the fulfilment of the Torah. Though it is beyond the author's intention, this article has important implications for Christian dialogue with other faiths, and the role of scripture in revelation and salvation.
(Editors)

The encounter with Judaism differs significantly from the Church's encounter with other religions. In this encounter, the Old Testament is the common ground.¹ In this encounter, we are reminded that the Early Church first grew up within the Jewish People, and that the Old Testament from the beginning was its basic document of faith which it shared with the rest of the people. But as the Early Church and the Synagogue parted ways, we also understand that the Old Testament became a dividing issue.²

The American Jewish scholar, Jakob J. Petuchowski, in the article on the theology of the Jewish prayer book, has described the difference and yet the structural parallelism between Christianity and Judaism by using [John 3:16](#):

For God so loved the world

For God so loved Israel,

that He gave His one and only Son,

that He gave us His *Torah*,

that whoever believes in Him,

that all who keep it,

shall not perish,

shall not perish,

but have eternal life.

but have eternal life.

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Petuchowski comments on this comparison, saying that the significance of Christ in Christianity is comparable to the significance of the Torah—the Law—in Judaism.

¹ Exemplifying this directly is e.g. *M. Dayan*, *Living with the Bible*, Jerusalem 1978, and in an analytical way, *C. Schoneveld*, *The Bible in Israeli Education*, Assen/Amsterdam 1976.

² Cf. e.g. *Bristol document of Faith and Order* from 1967, reprinted in *R. Dobbert*, *Das Zeugnis der Kirche für die Juden*, *Missionierende Gemeinde*—Heft 16, pp.96ff.

This emphasis on respectively Christ and the Torah is also valid as will be seen when we have a closer look at the use and the interpretation of the Old Testament in the Early Synagogue and the Early Church. The aim of the present article is not to break new ground in the ongoing debate on OT hermeneutics, but to bring us back to the starting point in the Church's use and understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures. We shall go back to the early centuries AD and to New Testament times and describe the use of the Old Testament in the Early Synagogue, then see how the Early Church is dependent upon Early Judaism in its use and interpretation of the Old Testament, but also how the Church and Pharisaic Judaism took different ways. This will lead us to a discussion on the relationship between Christ and the Torah, the Law, in the New Testament and the Early Church, before we summarize the argument in some concluding points regarding use of the OT in the Church today.

THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE EARLY SYNAGOGUE

We start off with the use of the Old Testament in the Synagogue in the first centuries of the common era and make some remarks on the *reading*, the *preaching* and the *study* of the OT. However, first we must recognize the obvious fact, that the Jews then—as today—did not speak of an Old Testament. The collection of Old Testament Scriptures was known according to its three main sections: the Law or the five books of Moses (*ha-Tora*), the Prophets—including all the historical books as well as the major and minor Prophets (*ha-Nevi'im*) and finally the writings that comprise the Psalms, the Book of Job and the rest of the Old Testament Books (*ha-Ketuvim*). Today, therefore, the Jewish designation of the Old Testament Scriptures is simply TANAK—an abbreviation for its three sections (*Tora*, *Nevi'im*, *Ketuvim*).

From early post-exilic times it became a custom to read a portion of the *Torah*, in the Synagogue on the Sabbath, on Monday and on Thursday.³ The whole Pentateuch was divided into weekly portions (*Sedarim*). However, two systems of reading seemed to develop: in Palestine, they read the five books of Moses in the course of a three-year cycle, thus dividing the Pentateuch into 155 weekly portions p. 185 (also 153 and 167).⁴ In the East, in Babel, however, they followed a one-year cycle and divided the Pentateuch into 54 portions. In the course of time, this became the universal Jewish practice, and in the Synagogue today the Torah is read according to this annual cycle, divided into 54 portions.⁵

At the time of the New Testament it had also become a practice to read a short lesson from the *Prophetic* Books in addition to the Torah portion—the so-called *Haftara*.

³ Cf. *Talmud Jer. Meg.* IV, 1; *Babli Baba Kamma* 82^a Mekilta de Rabbi Jismael, Vajassa 1, 77–80 (Lauterbach-edition, 1933).

⁴ The existence of a fixed Palestinian triennial cycle has been argued by A. Buechler, *The Reading of the Law and Prophets in a Triennial Cycle*, and *ibid*, *Reading of the Prophets in a Triennial Cycle*, in *Contributions to the Scientific Study of Jewish Liturgy*, ed. J. Petuchowski, New York 1970, pp.181–302; both articles reprinted from JQR 5, 1893 and 6, 1894. This hypothesis has been called into question by J. Heinemann, *The Triennial Lectionary Cycle*, JJS 19, 1968, 41–48, and *ibid*, *Ha-Machzor Ha-Telath-Shenati we-duach Ha-Shanah*, *Tarbiz* 33, 1964, 362–368. Cf. also W. D. Davies, *Christian Origins and Judaism*, Philadelphia 1962, 67–95. It has, however, to some degree been confirmed by B. Z. Wacholder, *A History of the Sabbatical Readings of Scripture for the 'Triennial Cycle'*, *Prolegomenon* in J. Mann—I. Sonne, *The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue*, Vol. I, 1940, Repr. New York 1971.

⁵ Cf. e.g. I. Elbogen, *Der juedische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, Frankfurt 1931—Hildesheim 1967, pp.155–205.

Whereas the Torah was read in continuous lessons, the prophetic pericopes were selected to illustrate the specific Torah lesson of the day.⁶ But it is uncertain when a fixed order of *Haftarot* developed.⁷ We therefore understand that the Torah lesson always was of primary importance, whereas the prophetic pericope was of auxiliary character. Texts from the writings (*ha-Ketuvim*) (the *hagiographia*) were excluded from the lectionary of the Synagogue, except at the main festivals when one of the five scrolls (the *Megillot*: Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations) was read.⁸ The chanting of Psalms from the beginning played an important part in the Jewish Liturgy.

The particular relationship between the Torah lesson and the prophetic pericope can be illustrated by the readings of the Sabbath called *Para* (Heifer). The Torah reading of this day is from [Numbers 19](#), about the red heifer as the sacrifice of purification and about water of purification, for the removal of sins. The prophetic lesson connected with this text (*seder*) is [Ezekiel 36:18–32](#), where God says that He will sprinkle water upon the people and cleanse them from all their uncleanness. In this manner, the ritual acts of purification prescribed [p. 186](#) for the people is related to God's eschatological act of purification.⁹ In addition to the weekly portion of the Torah to be read together with a prophetic text, there were separate readings for festivals and holidays: relevant Torah portions were read as well as selected prophetic texts that could illustrate the Torah text or the content of the festival. For the *Day of Atonement* (*Yom Ha-Kippurim*) they read [Leviticus 16](#) from the Torah and one of the prophetic texts was the Book of Jonah, exemplifying the right attitude of repentance, the right way of afflicting oneself ([Lev. 16:20](#)).¹⁰

To provide a proper understanding of the Old Testament texts read, a *sermon* (a homily) was often given that particularly explained the relationship between the Torah lesson and the prophetic pericope.¹¹ Many of these sermons/homilies are kept in later rabbinic homiletical commentaries to biblical books, the so-called homiletical *Midrashim*. An early anthology of homilies is the *Pesiqta Rabbati*. Here we find a Homily for Pentecost, dealing with the giving of the Law which is commemorated on the Jewish Pentecost. This homily takes its departure from a quotation from the Song of Solomon, which is read at the festival, and ends up with quotations from [Exodus 20](#), which is the Torah lesson for the festival. According to the rabbinic interpretation, the Song of Solomon describes in poetic language the covenantal love-relationship between God and His people Israel. And Pentecost was in this period already a festival commemorating the Sinai-Covenant and particularly the giving of the Torah. It is then interesting to note how the Song of Solomon is here interpreted. Chapter [5](#), verse [13](#) that is quoted, reads 'The cheeks of my beloved are like beds of spices, yielding fragrance. His lips are lilies, distilling liquid myrrh'. However, the Jewish homily quotes a paraphrasing translation into Aramaic of the so-

⁶ *Babli Meg. 29 b.*

⁷ For this problem cf. the references given in footnote 4.

⁸ Cf. *I. Elbogen*, op. cit.

⁹ Cf. *Pesiqta Rabbati*, Piska 14–15-end, W. Braude, Yale Judaica Series, New Haven 1968, Vol.I. p.295. Cf. also *E. Werner*, *The Sacred Bridge—Liturgical Parallels in Synagogue and Early Church*, New York 1970 (1959), p.78.

¹⁰ Cf. *Babli Meg. 31a*; *M.D. Herr*, Day of Atonement, art Enc. Jud., Jerusalem 1971, Vol.5, 1379; cf. *E. Werner*, op. cit., p.79ff.

¹¹ For the intricate problems here involved, see e.g. *B. Z. Wacholder*, op. cit. Cf. also *J. Bowker*, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature, An Introduction to Jewish Interpretation of Scripture*, Cambridge 1969.

called *Targum Jonathan*, and this rendering clearly displays the early Jewish understanding of the text that is expressed in the homily itself. 'His tablets (of ten lines resembling rows) in a terrace garden of spices; they have as many subtle points and matters as a garden has fragrances; the lips of the Sages who occupy themselves with Torah, disseminate subtle interpretations on every aspect thereof, and the p. 187 words of their mouths are as choice myrrh'. Here we see how the Song of Solomon is interpreted within the mentioned framework of the covenantal love-relationship between God and His people and related in an allegoric way to [Exod. 20](#); the love of the people (she) to God (He) now is expressed in the people's love of the Torah, whereby the 'cheeks of my beloved' becomes the two tablets of the Torah, and in the midst of the people even the Torah-Sages are regarded as 'His Lips'. Hence, the Song of Solomon, [5](#) speaks of the beauty of the Law, given at Sinai as it is told in [Exod. 20](#).¹²

This emphasis on the Torah in the reading of the OT in the Synagogue was paralleled by its dominant role in the somewhat later *education* of children and youth. At the age of five the child was introduced to the *study* of the Torah. The child then started by reading the Book of Leviticus, which expresses where the emphasis was put in the use and the understanding of the Old Testament and of the Torah. The Midrash explains that the children start with the Book of Leviticus because 'as the sacrifices are clean and the children are clean, so they shall come clean and occupy themselves with clean matters'.¹³ After Leviticus followed the other parts of the Torah and later the Prophets and the Hagiographia. The ideal, but probably seldom implemented educational progress for the children and the youth is expressed in an old saying of Judah ben Tema at the end of the second Century: 'At five years old one is fit for Scripture, at ten years for the *Mishnah*, at thirteen for the fulfilment of the commandments, at fifteen for the study of the *Talmud*'.¹⁴ After the study of the Torah, at the age of ten, came the study of the *Mishnah*, which was a collection of legal discussions and decisions (*halakhot*) by rabbinic authorities and at fifteen the study of the Law Code called the *Talmud*. The *Mishnah* and the *Talmud* referred to in this saying must be earlier collections of the same kind as those we usually refer to by these names: collections that found their final form in the *Mishnah* around 200 AD and the *Talmud* in the 5th–6th Centuries.

Most synagogues in the first centuries AD would operate an elementary school (*Beit Sefer*) and a more advanced school (*Beit Talmud* or *Beit Midrash*).¹⁵ In the *Beit Sefer* the students would study the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings, what later was called the *Written Torah*. In the *Beit Talmud*, the students would continue by p. 188 learning the *halakhot* and the scriptural interpretations and expositions of the rabbis which was to be called the *Oral Torah* and later to be collected in the *Mishna* and the *Talmuds*, in *Toseft* and the *Midrashim*. As the sages in these times regarded the Torah as 'the very substance of their lives', the study of the Torah 'for its own sake' was of primary importance, and the Torah study was oriented towards the observance of the commandments and the keeping of the ritual purity according to the Law.¹⁶

¹² *Pesiqta Rabbat*, ed. op. cit., ad loc.

¹³ *Leviticus Rabba*, 7, 3; *Pesiqte de Ray Kahana*, Mandelbaum- 1962, p.118.

¹⁴ *P. Avot* 5, 21 Cf. *Eccles. Rabba* 7, 28.

¹⁵ TJ Meg. 3, 1.7 3d; TB. Ket. 105 a. Jfr. Enc. Jud. IV, p.401 and G. I. Moore, *Judaism*, New York 1971, Vol. 1, pp.308–22.

¹⁶ Enc. Jud. IV, p.399.

As we have used the word *Torah* several times already and vaguely translated it 'Law', we must at this point try to give a more accurate rendering of this word. Several scholars have in recent years argued that 'Torah' should rather be translated through words like 'teaching, instruction'. For Old Testament usage of the word, this may be correct. E. E. Urbach, however, has for the Rabbinic literature probably more correctly argued for the rendering 'the constitution and the living regime of the people' and claimed that Torah actually is the 'institution, embodying the covenant between the people and its God, and reflecting a complex of precepts and statutes, customs and traditions linked to the history of the people and the acts of its rulers, Kings and Prophets'.¹⁷ The advantage of this comprehensive definition is that the Torah expresses a covenantal reality for the people with its origin in the revelation on Sinai; at the same time Torah may thus comprise both the Written and the Oracle Code, but with an emphasis on the statutory and the legal parts of the Pentateuch—in particular the Decalogue and the Holiness Code—and with subsequent emphasis on the commandments (*mitzvot*) and the rabbinic decisions concerning conduct and behaviour in secular and ritual spheres (*halakhot*). With the mentioned emphasis on the five books of the Torah in the reading, the preaching and the study of the *Tanak* (the Old Testament) in the Early Synagogue, this concept of the Torah also became a central key to the understanding and interpretation of the *Tanak*. We shall return later to this point.

THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The New Testament is one of the witnesses who testify to the above mentioned reading of the Torah and the Prophets in the Synagogues at that time. In [Luke 4:16](#) we are told that Jesus came to Nazareth, the town of his Childhood, and on the Sabbath he went to the Synagogue [P. 189](#) as was his custom. In the Synagogue service of that Sabbath morning, he read the prophetic pericope of the day, from [Isaiah 61:11](#),¹⁸ about the one that is anointed to preach good news to the poor, render the sight to the blind, set at liberty those who are oppressed and bring the Jubilee year to the people. After the reading, it is stated the eyes of all were fixed on Jesus, who continued by declaring: 'Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing ...' ([Luke 4:21](#)).

This event in the life of Jesus is important from two points of view. First, Jesus went to the Synagogue as did his fellow Jews and listened to the readings from the Old Testament together with them. Secondly, it is equally important that he relates the Scripture lesson to himself, in front of his own people—he places himself in the midst of the Scriptures, and presents himself as the fulfilment of the hope of the people.

A similar event is told in the Book of Acts, chapter [13](#). The Apostle Paul and his companion came to the city of Antioch in Asia Minor and according to their custom went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. After the reading of the Torah lesson and the prophetic pericope, it is told, Paul was asked to speak to the people and he delivers a remarkable sermon ([13:16–41](#)). He gives first a brief summary of the history of Israel and of God's redemptive and salvific acts for his people, then states that this God of Israel raised up a saviour for the people from the family of David, Jesus from Nazareth. The last half of the sermon concerns this saviour: that God fulfilled the promise to the Patriarchs for the sake of the people when He raised Jesus from death ([13:32](#)).

¹⁷ E. E. Urbach, *The Sages, Their Concepts and Beliefs*, Jerusalem 1975, Vol.I–II; Vol.I, p.286ff.

¹⁸ cf. A. Buechler, *The Reading of the Law and Prophets etc.*, op. cit.

We note that both in this summary of the history of Israel and this proclamation of the resurrected Jesus Christ there are many direct and indirect references to the OT texts, particularly to the historical books, the Psalms, the Prophet Isaiah and the Prophet Habakkuk. In this sermon Paul uses the OT in two ways that are interrelated: the OT is a record of salvation history that finds its climax in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and it contains promises that are now fulfilled in the resurrected Jesus from Nazareth.

These two events from the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts also demonstrate the change that now takes place in the use of the OT by Jesus Himself and His apostles, as well as by the Early Church. In its use of the OT, the early Church is dependent upon the synagogue and Early Judaism, and it continues to use the OT as its basic document of faith and as a record of salvation history. However, the OT is now used with a different emphasis and with a new reference determining its [p. 190](#) exposition. This can be seen both in the *preaching* as well as in the *reading* of the Scripture in the Early Church.

Throughout the Book of Acts we see that *the message of the Apostles* to their fellow Jews and to Gentiles comprises three elements:⁰⁰ 1) that the Messiah is a suffering Messiah, 2) that the Messiah is to rise from the dead, 3) and that this Messiah is Jesus in whose name forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to Israel and all nations. Wherever we meet this preaching, however, the apostles—Paul as well as Peter—argue on every point that this happened *according to the Scriptures* ([Acts 3:12–20](#); [13:16–42](#); [24:46–47](#); [26:22–23](#)). In the scriptural argument of the Apostles, there are certain texts that occur more frequently than others, texts that we also meet in other NT books as proof texts for God's work through His Son Jesus Christ. These textual selections are particularly from the Book of Isaiah, Jeremiah and certain minor Prophets as well as the Psalms, the most known being the Messianic or Royal [Psalms 2](#) and [110](#) and the Songs of the Suffering Servant, mainly [Isaiah 53](#), such texts quoted throughout the New Testament.¹⁹

In connection with the preaching of the Gospel *Kerygma*, the Early Church selected and developed a whole body of Old Testament material: Testimony collections or strings of testimony passages applying to the Gospel facts. This body of material can be found throughout the NT writings and it is striking how the quotations and the allusions to the Psalms, Isaiah and the other Prophets dominate, whereas there are relatively few references to the legal material of the Pentateuch. In this use of the collections or strings of testimony passages from OT, however, the first Apostles and the Early Church followed a *rabbinic method*: the Sages and the rabbis of New Testament times used to combine proof texts to elucidate a legal or a theological matter, and such strings of testimony passages were handed over in the rabbinic traditions. Ample evidence for this can be found particularly in the rabbinic Bible commentaries, the so-called *Midrashim*.²⁰

The dependence upon the synagogue, however can be seen more [p. 191](#) clearly in the *reading* of the Scripture in the Early Church. In different geographical regions different traditions developed throughout the early centuries in the reading of the Bible (Gallican, Moz-arabic, Roman, Greek, Armenian, Nestorian lectionaries etc.). However in all of them a certain influence can be discerned of the continuous and cyclical reading of the OT in

¹⁹ For this and the following, cf. *C. H. Dodd, According to the Scriptures*, London 1953.

We do not here subscribe to the more rigid hypothesis of *Rendel Harris*, *Testimonies*, Vol.I–II, Cambridge 1916–1920, about an existing testimony book in the Early Church, but are convinced of the existence of testimony collections or strings of testimonies in the oral tradition of the Church.

²⁰ This point has not as yet *per se* been much analysed in the scholarly research of the rabbinic literature, but represents an underlying factor in many research contributions. Cf. e.g. the important contribution given by *W. S. Towner*, *The Rabbinic 'Enumeration of Scriptural Example'. A Study in a rabbinic Pattern of discourse with special reference to Mekhilta d'rabbi Ishmael*, Stud. Post-Bibl. 22, Leiden 1973.

the synagogue.²¹ Although Sunday, the Day of the Lord, early became the main day of worship, the Early Church retained the main outline of the Jewish calendar year, and it seems that the OT lessons to some degree remained intact in the Christian services. The old *Apostolic Constitutions* (2nd Cent., Syria) give instructions for five pericopes to be read as the weekly portion: from the Law, the Prophets, the Epistles, the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospel.²² However, the introduction of the reading of the Apostolic writings gave a new dimension to the reading of the OT, and the synagogal lectionary was not simply automatically adopted, but important changes took place.

We shall here restrict ourselves to giving one example of this: the OT readings on the Holy Saturday, at the Easter Vigil.²³ Both in the old Roman as well as some Asian lectionaries there are two sets of OT text read on this evening. The first set of texts represents lessons read in the synagogue during Passover: [Exod. 12:14](#) and [15](#), the eschatological text of [Ezek. 37](#) and [Psalms 35](#). But then there are also three texts from a different setting, namely from the Jewish Day of Atonement that was celebrated in the autumn: the prophetic Book of Jonah, [Psalms 27](#) and [Genesis 1:1](#). This example clearly demonstrates that a conscious and deep theological reflection lay behind the taking over and the transformation of the reading of OT texts. The Book of Jonah was chosen for the Day of Atonement to exemplify the right attitude of repentance and affliction of oneself. When the reading of this book was transferred to Easter, this was caused by a shift in the understanding of the book itself. Jesus had referred to Jonah as a symbol of His own destiny ([Matt. 12:10–12](#)); read at Easter, the book now rather exemplified the Grace of God as it was perfectly demonstrated through the atoning death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Day of Atonement of the Old Testament had been fulfilled and completed through the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, that was commemorated at Easter, and hence OT readings of the Day of Atonement had been transferred to Holy Saturday [p. 192](#) and the Easter Vigil. The OT was now read and used as a book that points towards and speaks about God's redemptive act through Jesus Christ.

These two examples concerning the use of the OT in the Early Church—the testimony collections for the preaching of the Gospel and the reading of OT lessons in the liturgy—illustrate how the *Tanak*—the Torah, the Prophets and the writings—remained the Bible of the Early Church, and how traditions and customs from the synagogue were taken over, but transformed and related to a new centre of salvation history and a new covenantal reality: Jesus Christ.

FROM TORAH-CENTRED TO CHRISTO-CENTRIC INTERPRETATION

In this brief survey of the use of OT in the synagogue and the Early Church, the differing understanding and interpretation of the OT has been indicated. The emphasis on the Torah in the reading of the OT in the synagogue is paralleled by the use of the concept of the Torah as hermeneutical key to the scripture. Likewise, God's redemptive act through Christ became the hermeneutical key in the Early Church. In concentrating on some OT texts and their interpretation in respectively synagogue and Church (rabbinic literature vs. NT), we shall have a closer look at the implications of this new hermeneutical key, and

²¹ Cf. mainly *E. Werner*, op. cit.

²² *Apostolic Constitution*, Book 8. Edition by e.g. F. X. Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum*, 2 Vols, 1905.

²³ Cf. *E. Werner*, op. cit., pp.78–92.

this will then take us into a brief discussion concerning the relationship between the OT, the Torah and Christ.

The great prophet of the exile, whose message we have in ‘the book of Consolation’—[Isaiah 40–55](#), is comforting the people and proclaims in the name of the Lord that salvation is at hand. This he often does in metaphorical and allegorical language. In [44:3](#) the Lord promises ‘that I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground’, and in [55:1](#) the Prophet invites the people: ‘Ho, everyone who is thirsty, come to the waters’. In [58:11](#), we also meet the promise that the people shall be ‘like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters fail not’. In the *rabbinic tradition* this promise of living water is related to the Torah. A rabbinic commentary to the Book of Deuteronomy, called *Sifrei Deuteronomium*, explains it: ‘The words of the Torah is compared to water: as water means life for the world, so are also the words of the Torah life for the world ... And as water is given to the world, free of charge, so can also the words of the Torah be obtained free of charge, as said in [Isaiah 55:1](#)’.²⁴ However, when the [p. 193](#) rabbis in this manner spoke about the Torah, they did not only mean the written Law of the Pentateuch but also included the ‘Oral Torah’, the rabbinic legal decisions concerning ritual purity and a life according to the commandments (*halakhot*) that later were gathered in the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud* already mentioned. This oral Torah, these *halakhot*, were understood to have been transmitted from Moses on Sinai in an oral manner down to New Testament times and further. Accordingly, Rabbi Meir, a famous rabbi of the second Century AD and other rabbis, could say that a man who occupies himself with the Torah and learns new *halakhot* every day, becomes ‘like a spring of water, whose waters fail not’.²⁵

The rabbinic interpretation of the mentioned passages in the Book of Isaiah is, however, not arbitrary allegorization. It is based on a theological tradition and reflection that goes back to the OT itself. The call of the prophet to the thirsty to ‘come to the waters’, and to the hungry to come and eat, is related to and dependent upon the invitation of Wisdom in [Proverbs 9](#) to those ‘thirsty and hungry’ to come to her to eat and drink ([Prov. 9:1–6](#); [Is. 55:1–3](#)). In the late OT period, wisdom was identified with Torah. This is particularly reflected in the apocryphal Book of Jesus Sirach (ch.1:26; 19:20; 21:11; 23:27; 24:23), but is already found in some of the Psalms ([19:8ff](#); [119:103ff](#)). Even in [Psalm 1](#), we find the same terminology as in the Isaiah passages, in the description of the man whose delight is in the Torah and who resembles ‘a tree planted by streams of waters’ ([Ps. 1:2f](#)). This same Torah-Wisdom-tradition pictured the Torah as pre-existent to the creation of the world, with the Torah as the creator-‘instrument’ (cf. [Ps. 104](#); [Prov. 8](#)). And this tradition forms an important background to the *logos*-concept in John’s Gospel, chapter [1](#), where Jesus is described as ‘the word’ that ‘was with God in the beginning’ through whom ‘all things were made’ and in whom ‘was life’ ([John 1:2f](#)). R. E. Brown comments on this part of the Johannine prologue: ‘Jesus is divine Wisdom, pre-existent, but now come among men to teach them life. Not the Torah, but Jesus Christ is the creator and the source of light and life’.

This development of an OT tradition is important to have in mind when we now return to a reference to the same Isaiah-passages in the preaching of Jesus as rendered in the same Gospel of John. Jesus also spoke about ‘living waters’ mentioned in the Isaiah texts. However, he relates the invitation to drink living water to his own person. In his talk [p. 194](#) with the Samaritan woman, Jesus said to her: ‘Whoever drinks of the water I will give

²⁴ Sif. Deut. 11, 22 48/84. Edition by H. S. Horowitz and L. Finkelstein, New York 1969 (1935–1939).

²⁵ P. Avot 6 1. Midr. Tehelim 1, 18/9a. Edition by S. Buber, Wilna 1899 translation by W. G. Braude, Yale Judaica Series, New Haven 1959.

him, will never thirst. The water I shall give him, will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life' ([John 4:14](#)).

With similar reference to the Isaiah passages, Jesus also spoke to the people at the last day of the feast of Tabernacles, and proclaimed according to [John 7:37–39](#), 'If any one thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water"'. Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him should receive, for as yet the Spirit has not been given, because Jesus had not been glorified'. In this saying, Jesus presents himself as the source of living water, and the Gospel writer adds that the living water in the life of those who believe in Jesus, actually is the spirit of the resurrected and glorified Jesus Christ. It is not the Torah that is the living water and not the ones who fulfil the commandments and *halakhot* who become like a spring of water whose waters fail not. Jesus himself is the source of living water, and his spirit becomes in those who believe in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

In the different interpretations of these Isaiah passages, we see how Jesus takes the place that was given to the Torah in the Synagogue and in rabbinic Judaism. That Jesus Christ in this way places himself in the midst of the OT and in the midst of the life of the people can also be seen in the synoptic Gospels. In the old rabbinic writing, *Pirke Avot*, we read: 'When they sit together and are occupied with the Torah, the *Shekinah* (i.e. the presence of God) is among them'.²⁶ In a similar statement Jesus says to his disciples according to [Matthew 18:20](#): 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them'. These parallel sayings as well as our previous examples present us with the problem of the understanding of the Law in the Early Church in the broader context of their understanding and use of the OT.

CHRIST AND TORAH

After this survey it would be easy to conclude that there is an antithetical relationship between Jesus and the Torah. Indeed, both NT scholars and other Christian theologians have jumped to this conclusion, stressing that Jesus and the Early Church were marked by a negative attitude to the Torah, wilfully abrogating it. This view has also led to a rather eclectic use of the Old Testament. However, taking the **P. 195** breadth of New Testament material and its Jewish setting into consideration, we are convinced that a different view is more consistent with our sources: when Jesus in his own preaching and in the teaching of the Early Church takes the place of the Torah—he does so in the terms of *fulfilment in a new revelatory event*. In the following we shall expound this view and have a look at some of its implications.²⁷

It is in [Matthew 5:17–20](#) that Jesus himself states that he has not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but that he has *come* to *fulfil* them. The two words 'come' (*elton*) and 'fulfil' (*pleerosai*) are used elsewhere in the Gospels to express consciousness of Jesus about his own mission and ministry, in particular his messianic fulfilment of OT promise.²⁸ When Jesus comes to *fulfil* the Torah, it is thus more than a confirmation by way of acting according to the Torah. Through his life, his ministry and his teaching, he brings the Torah, the revealed will of God, into a new stage of salvation history; he brings

²⁶ P. Avot 3, 7.

²⁷ In a forthcoming publication in another context, the author will give a more detailed treatment of the exegetical problems here involved, in a paper entitled 'The Messiah and the Torah in the New Testament'.

²⁸ [Mt. 10:34f](#); [20:28f](#); [26:54ff](#); [Mk. 14:49](#); [Luke 4:21](#); [24:44](#) e.a.

it with him into the age of messianic fulfilment, which also means the eschatological realization of the good Will of God.

In stating his fulfilment of the Torah, Jesus also speaks of the smallest letters and the dots of the Torah. He then follows contemporary rabbinic tradition, emphasizing in this way the continuing validity of the Torah for the sake of its implementation ([Mt. 5:18–20](#)). In dispute with Pharisees and in conversation with the rich young man, Jesus focuses upon the commandments of the Decalogue ([Mt. 15:4ff](#); [19:17ff](#)). Or in answer to questions from Pharisees, Jesus spells out the greatest commandments of the Law, stressing the love to God as expressed in the *Shema* and the love of the neighbour ([Mt. 22:34ff](#); cf. [Deut. 6:4f](#) and [Lev. 19:18](#)).²⁹

However, precisely as Jesus confirms the validity and authority of the Torah, he also enters into dispute with the Torah-teachers of his own age. Much material has been brought forward in recent years that shows considerable proximity between Jesus and the Pharisees in their attitudes to the Torah. But there is also a fundamental difference: Jesus objects to the rabbinic development of a normative oral Tradition, to an Oral Torah. This is illustrated by the controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees concerning Sabbath observance ([Mt. 12:1–15](#); Luke p. 196 [6:1–11](#)). The Sages had decided that chronic diseases do not ‘override’ the Sabbath. However, Jesus heals a man with a shrivelled hand on the Sabbath and thereby comes in conflict with the tradition of the elders. Jesus broke down their ‘Torah-hedge’ which prevented an act of loving kindness. In addition to this, Jesus claims for himself authority to decide what is good. Similarly, Jesus defends his disciples who have picked grain in the field on the Sabbath and acted against the Oral Tradition and indirectly even against a precept within the Torah-Written Torah.³⁰ Jesus does not abrogate the Sabbath observance in this instance, but refers to exceptional cases of Sabbath conduct in the life of David and in the regular Temple service of the priest, and then he claims for himself authority to decide what is according to the will of God: ‘For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath’. Over against the Oral Tradition Jesus restores the authority of the basic precepts of the Written Torah ([Mt. 23:23](#)) and claims authority for himself in the exposition of the Torah.

In order to get further perspective on the words of Jesus that he has come to fulfil the Torah, it is worth noting that this statement comes in the context of his proclamation that ‘the Kingdom of Heaven is near’ ([Mt. 4:17](#); [5:3](#), [10](#); [6:33](#)). When Jesus demands from His disciples a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees, this righteousness is one linked to the Kingdom of Heaven. When Jesus thus claims to fulfil the Torah, this is an eschatological fulfilment which takes place as Jesus brings the Kingdom of Heaven near. Thus these three things belong together: Jesus, the Kingdom and the Torah.

The presence and the coming of the Kingdom through Jesus means the realization of the promises to the Patriarchs and the Prophets as well as of the will of God in the Torah. This Kingdom, which is brought near by Jesus, is the reality and realm of salvation: it is marked by God’s active redemption of men and by his presence and rule, and through Jesus, this Kingdom breaks its way through the world.³¹ Jesus therefore, now also transfers ‘a new righteousness to his disciples’ ([Mt. 5:20](#)). In the so-called ‘antithesis’ of [Mt. 5:21–48](#), we thus find a comprehensive collection of the material that further

²⁹ D. Flusser, *Jesus—in selbstzeugnissen und Bild-dokumenten*, Hamburg 1968; *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity* (Hebrew), Tel-Aviv 1979, in particular pp.226–234 ‘The Torah in the Sermon on the Mount’.

³⁰ Cf. M. Shabb VII, 2; [Exod. 34:21](#).

³¹ Cf. S. Aalen, ‘Reign’ and ‘House’ in the Kingdom of God in the Gospels, *New Test. studies* 8, 1962, p.215ff.

illustrates Jesus' attitude to the Torah and his own ethical teaching for those who 'enter the Kingdom'. As Jesus deals with the 5th and 6th commandments he restores their absolute validity and emphasizes their unlimited area of application (5:21-30). However, in connection with the OT precepts of p. 197 divorce, oath and retaliation (5:31-42), Jesus goes beyond the regulations of the Mosaic Torah. He emphasizes the unbreakable unity of husband and wife, stresses perfect truth in all speech and demands forgiving and unlimited love over against retaliating Justice (5:43-48). Jesus may therefore summarize his teaching on the new righteousness by saying: 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect' (5:48).³²

At this point we must again bring into focus the Palestinian-Jewish background of Jesus and the NT. The definition of the Torah that we quoted above, emphasized that Torah must be understood in the context of the covenant. The rabbis used to stress that the redemption from Egypt preceded the giving of the Torah at Sinai: that they first accepted the Kingdom of God when they were redeemed from Egypt, and that they, thereafter, accepted his decrees at Sinai.³³ There seems to be a certain similarity in pattern between this rabbinic tradition and the Gospel material we have just presented, which also points to the development in salvation history: Jesus came and proclaimed that the Kingdom is at hand, that God's redeeming Grace and activity is eschatologically present in his own person and ministry in a new covenant. Just as there is continuity with respect to the redemptive act of God (the Gospel), between the Old and the New Covenant, so there is also continuity with regard to the Torah and the will of God (Law) for his people in the New Covenant. As Christ is the focal point in the coming of the Kingdom, he also becomes the focal point in fulfilling the Torah: the Torah must now be read, interpreted and applied in a 'New righteousness' personified, determined and taught by Christ.

PAUL'S USE OF THE TORAH

It is our conviction that *Paul* in his letters follows the same basic pattern in his understanding of the Torah. However, the context and the perspective of Paul's ministry is different. The Pharisee from Tarsus becomes the apostle to the Gentiles in his encounter with the risen Lord. This encounter and Paul's discovery of the new covenant in Christ transform his reading of the Old Testament and the Torah. It has often been stated that Jesus replaces the Torah at the centre of Paul's life when he meets the resurrected Christ on the Damascus Road.³⁴ But p. 198 also in Paul's case, this replacement and the new approach to the Torah should not be understood in terms of a negative abrogation, but rather in the context of *fulfilment* in the reality of the *New Covenant*. This we shall see as we first turn to some of Paul's difficult, negative statements of the Torah, and let them help us to gain a proper understanding of the fulfilment.

As a rabbinic trainee Paul knew that the Torah embodied the covenant between God and Israel and was the *proprium* of Israel over against the nations. In view of the Christ-event and the new covenantal unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, Paul now has to conclude that the Torah has been superceded and replaced by Christ as the embodiment of the covenant. In [Ephesians 2](#), Paul speaks of Christ as our peace, who has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles and abolished 'the Law with its commandments' ([Ephes. 2:14f](#)). Now salvation has come in Christ for both Jews and

³² Cf. also Jerem. [31:33](#).

³³ Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Bachodesh 6.

³⁴ Cf. e.g. W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, London 1970-1973, p.149ff.

Gentiles. However, this does not imply that the Torah has been abrogated in terms of genuine revelation of the holy will of God. In the same chapter of [Ephes. 2](#), Paul in various ways expresses the continuity between the old and the new covenant: in Christ, the Gentiles who were excluded from citizenship in Israel, have now become fellow-citizens with the people of God, built on the foundations of the apostles and the prophets—a holy temple, a dwelling in which God lives by His spirit. Paul later also asks the Ephesians not to live as the Gentiles, as they have been created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness ([4:17, 24](#)). Christ is now the embodiment of the covenant and the Torah has been removed as a dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles, but remains a genuine revelation of the holy will of God.

However, as Paul discovers that salvation is only in Christ, he has also to draw new conclusions concerning the relationship between the Torah and his own people Israel. Paul was probably acquainted with the view that R. Tanchuma later expressed: ‘The word of the Lord went forth in two aspects, slaying the heathens who would not accept it, but giving life to Israel who accepted the Torah’ (Exod. Rabba 5:9).³⁵ But now Paul has seen that it is only in Christ that God gives salvation and life, and consequently he concludes that it is futile also for the Jews to try to achieve righteousness and salvation through the Torah and apart from Christ ([Rom. 9:30ff; 10:1–4](#)). Thus his understanding of life and death through the Torah is also transformed: the discovery that salvation is only through Christ, leads Paul to discover anew the [p. 199](#) absolute demand of God and his absolute wrath ([Rom. 1:32; 2:5f; 2:16; Gal. 3:10](#)) and he must conclude that the Holy will of God in the Torah becomes an instrument of death—even for the Jews—when they are apart from Christ. It is on this background that Paul develops his new understanding of the Torah in the history of Israel as ‘a custodian unto Christ’ ([Gal. 3:23f](#)), and of the rather negative function of the Torah as revealing and condemning sin ([Rom. 7:7–25](#)).

But Paul has more to say about the Torah. When he speaks of its negative function in revealing and condemning sin, he repeatedly stresses that it is good, holy and spiritual ([7:12, 14](#); cf. [7:25](#)). It is then worth noting that when Paul reaches the climax in [Rom. 8:1](#), proclaiming that ‘there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus’, he continues immediately by mentioning the Law of the Spirit of life and emphasizes that the requirements (the righteous requirements) of the Law are now fulfilled in those who live according to the Spirit ([8:2, 4](#)). The Torah has not been abrogated, on the contrary, when man in Christ is set free from the condemnation of the Torah, he is also set free to a new life according to the Spirit whereby the righteous requirements of the Torah may be fulfilled.

In [Rom. 8](#), as in many other places, Paul mentions together the Torah and the Spirit. This is part of the terminology describing the reality of the new covenant.³⁶ On this point, Paul is dependent upon the prophetic tradition that goes back to Ezekiel and Jeremiah ([Jer. 31:31–34; Ez. 36:26–28](#)). These prophets describe a new covenant which will differ from the Sinai covenant, and they tell that God will give the people a new heart and pour out his spirit so that they will follow His decrees and Laws. It is on this line that Paul speaks about fulfilling the requirements of the Torah. He also writes to the Romans in the same context that ‘we serve not under the old written code, but in the new life in the Spirit’ ([Rom. 7:6](#) cf. [2 Cor. 3:3f](#)). When Paul in this way emphasizes the newness of the life in Christ according to the Spirit over against the Torah from Sinai, we also understand that he gives considerable place to the life and the example of Christ in his ethical teaching.

³⁵ Cf. [Sir. 45:5](#); Ps. Sal. [14:1ff](#).

³⁶ Cf. [Rom. 7:6; 2 Cor. 1:22; 3:3ff; Ephes. 1:13; 4:30](#).

However, this should again not be regarded as an abrogation of the Torah as the good will of God, but rather be seen in the context of its fulfilment in the new stage of salvation history.

It may be that Paul's statements concerning the Torah and the Spirit reflect the fact that the Spirit fell upon the disciples on Pentecost Day, when the Sinai covenant and the giving of the Torah was celebrated in [p. 200](#) the temple and the synagogues.³⁷ In the Early Church this fact did not cause any disregard for the Torah, but was regarded in fulfilment categories. Consequently, the early lectionaries prescribe the reading of [Exodus 19–20](#) for Pentecost—the festival of the Spirit and the Church.³⁸ In this perspective, several of Paul's positive statements concerning the Torah and his practical references to it take on additional dynamic meaning ([Rom. 3:31](#); [7:2, 14](#); [13:8](#); [Gal. 5:14](#); [6:1ff, 6–16](#)).

As Paul thus deals with the question of Christ and the Torah, he also reveals his dynamic and comprehensive use of the Old Testament. For him the Old Testament is more than a collection or a list of messianic testimonies, or a typological book picturing Christ and a new morality. For Paul, the OT is a book of salvation history that leads towards Christ and continues to unfold him. And it is a book containing the holy Law of God which drives men towards Christ so that God in him may redeem them from the curse of the Law and restore them to new life in the Spirit with the fulfilment of his good will.

CONCLUSION

After this survey of some material from the Early Synagogue and the Early Church and this case-study concerning Christ and the Torah in the New Testament, we shall now summarize by way of drawing some conclusions for the understanding and the use of the OT in the Church today.

The NT and Early Church material that we have here presented, seem in our contemporary situation to call for a proper balance between two principles for our use of the OT: the normativity of Scripture in its entirety and the Christo-centric interpretation of scripture.

Our examples from the apostolic preaching and the reading of the OT in the Early Church underlines how the salvation history and the Word of God in the OT now only can be read and fully understood in light of the Christ-event. Even more clearly the relationship between Christ and the Torah shows how the OT as a revelatory word may be misused if it is read apart from the Christ-event. Christ put himself in the midst of the Hebrew Scriptures and thereby underlined their Christo-centric use and interpretation.

However, for the sake of the Church today, we must also *reverse* the [p. 201](#) Christo-centric approach to the OT and emphasize that Jesus Christ and the NT cannot be properly understood apart from the OT, and then the OT in its entirety. Too often a Christo-centric approach leads to a rather eclectic use of the OT which in the end may lead to faith in a Jesus from Nazareth which is not the Messiah of the Bible. The OT was the Holy Scripture for Jesus, for whom it contained the Word of God and recorded the work of God, and it was on the line of this work and this word that Jesus understood his ministry. Today our need is particularly to be able to see Jesus and read the New Testament in the light of the total witness of the OT. It is for this reason we emphasize a proper balance between the

³⁷ Cf. M. Weinfeld, Pentecost as Festival of the Giving of the Law, Immanuel 7, 1978, 7–18.

³⁸ Cf. g. Kraetschmar, Himmelfahrt und Pfingsten, ZKG 66, 1954, 209–253. J. Goudoever, Biblical Calendars, Leiden 1959.

two principles: the normativity of Scripture in its entirety and the Christo-centric approach to the Old Testament.

In a similar way there is today a need for a proper balance in the approach to the Old Testament as both salvation history and the spoken Word of God. Too often the OT is just regarded as history—even as salvation history—but then not very relevant since it belongs to the past. But this history becomes relevant as one listens to the Word of God spoken to Israel and mankind in and through history, and when one is made part of this history through the word. For this reason we also chose to deal at some length with the question of Christ and Torah—both ‘words from God’ par excellence, but words which belong to the history of the people of God’s Kingdom as it breaks its way through the world.

We started off with a note concerning the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Certainly, the importance of the OT for the life of the Church also points to the importance of the encounter with the synagogue in this respect. We have had opportunity to see how the Early Church was dependent upon the synagogue and upon rabbinic traditions as they developed their new understanding of the OT and how they transformed the lectionary of the Synagogue in their own reading of the OT. In today’s encounter with the synagogue we are once more made aware of these roots, and this encounter may help us to let the OT in its breadth and its dynamic content throw light on Christ and the New Testament and bring richness to the life of the Church. But then the Church may also talk meaningfully with the synagogue and the Jewish People about Christ and the Torah, giving witness to the Word that came into the world with life and light.

Dr. Kvarme serves in Israel. He is a member of the Norwegian Mission to Israel. [p. 202](#)

Imaginary Faith

Thomas Müntzer

*Translation and Introduction by James M. Stayer (abridged) Reprinted
with permission from The Mennonite Quarterly Review Vol. 55 1981
pp.99–130.*

Imaginary Faith (*von dem getichten glauben*) was written in 1524.

Today when theologies of revolution are demanding greater attention from Christians, the following translation by James Stayer of Thomas Müntzer’s protest will be found to be surprisingly relevant to our times, especially after the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther’s birth with the renewal emphasis on the great Reformer’s stand on sola fide. Müntzer ought not to be read uncritically yet Stayer’s introduction and translation reveal that the issues at the time of the Reformation are still ours and so can be studied with profit. Müntzer was both a theologian and a revolutionary. An explanation is needed about the system of footnotes in this article. There are two kinds of footnotes, one given by Stayer in numbers (1, 2, 3 etc.) and another by Müntzer himself in alphabets (aa, bb, cc, etc.). The alphabets are shown in the text, as in the German original, both at the beginning and at the end of the

passage in the text to which the footnote refers; thus one 'a' is at the beginning and the other 'a' at the end of the passage, while in the footnotes it is written as 'aa'. Heavy technical footnotes have been omitted.

Müntzer gave only chapter references in the Bible, as versification had not yet been adopted.

(Editors)

Thomas Müntzer was Martin Luther's most prominent and deadly enemy from within the Reformation camp, a good deal more threatening than Andreas Carlstadt, far more learned than Nicholas Storch, and much closer home than Ulrich Zwingli. He was also by much the most important Reformation theologian to pay with his life for his support of the rebels in the Great German Peasants' War of 1525 (the Anabaptists' Balthasar Hubmaier was probably the second most prominent individual of that description). These distinctions have earned him the extensive attention of Lutheran, and other, church historians, and Marxist, and other, students of early modern revolution. However many disagreements remain, Müntzer is now acknowledged as fully and truly theologian and revolutionary. And those two natures are p. 203 generally acknowledged to subsist in the one person without any essential contradiction.¹

Thomas Müntzer was also the addressee of the 'programmatic letters' (actually a letter and a long postscript) of September 5, 1524, from which we learn most about the religious views of Conrad Grebel and his associates in the months prior to the first believers' baptisms of the Reformation era.² The Grebel letter contains substantial criticism of Müntzer based on an awareness of his liturgical innovations, which the Zurich group regarded as making too many concessions to tradition and falling short of their own radical obedience to the Word of God.³ It also, in the postscript, makes a brief, but categorical, rejection of Müntzer's rumoured readiness to resort to violence in pursuit of a radical Reformation.⁴ These demurrers indicate that Carlstadt's was a greater authority than Müntzer's among the Zurich radicals, for Müntzer seemed in some respects to fall under Carlstadt's condemnation of the 'sparing of the weak' and the Zurich dissenters shared the attitude toward violence expressed by the congregation of Orlamünde when it refused to associate itself with Müntzer's Covenant for defence of the Gospel.⁵ p. 204

¹ It is an irony of historiography that an approximate consensus on Müntzer's character as theologian and revolutionary has been reached between the established Western church historians and the established Marxist-Leninist historians of the East bloc. In so doing they have occupied the ground of a once-despised, and still officially rejected, 'outsider', Ernst Bloch, and revised their own classics, Karl Holl on the one side, and Friedrich Engels and M. M. Smirin on the other. Ernst Bloch, *Thomas Müntzer als Theologe der Revolution* (Munich: Kurt Wolff, 1921); Karl Holl, 'Luther und die Schwärmer', *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, I: *Luther* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1932), 420–67; Friedrich Engels, *Der deutsche Bauernkrieg*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, VII (Berlin: Dietz, 1973), 327–413; M. M. Smirin, *Die Volksreformation des Thomas Münzer und der grosse Bauernkrieg* (Berlin: Dietz, 1956). See the concluding historiographical essays in Abraham Friesen and Hans-Jürgen Goertz, eds., *Thomas Müntzer, Wege der Forschung*, CDXCI (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978), 447–536.

² John C. Wenger, ed., *Conrad Grebel's Programmatic Letters of 1524* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald, 1970), contains both the Swiss German text and Wenger's translation cited below.

³ *Ibid.*, 18–27.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 38–39. This passage and the one cited in n.3 were the ones stressed by Harold S. Bender, *Conrad Grebel, 1498–1526. Founder of the Swiss Brethren* (Goshen, Ind.: Mennonite Historical Society, 1950), 110–19, 171–83, in his interpretation of the letter.

⁵ Carlstadt's influence on the Zurich radicals was treated by Walther Köhler, 'Die Zürcher Täufer', in Christian Neff, ed., *Gedenkschrift zum 400jährigen Jubiläum der Mennoniten oder Taufgesinnten, 1525–1925*

However, the proto-Anabaptists of Zurich expressed the confident hope that Müntzer and Carlstadt were ‘of one mind’, and the opinion that the two of them were ‘doing more than all preachers of all nations’. ‘We regard you and Carlstadt as the purest proclaimers and preachers of the purest Word of God’, they wrote.⁶ This praise and feeling of solidarity with Müntzer was based on the Zurichers’ reading of Müntzer’s ‘two books on the spurious faith’, which were the immediate cause of their letter to him. Elsewhere they indicated that they had been confirmed in their own views by his ‘writing against spurious faith and baptism’, and that, besides being pleased with what he had to say, they wanted further instruction from him on the subject of baptism.⁷ The works referred to by Grebel and his associates were the *Protestation or Demonstration* (*Protestation odder empietung*) and *On the Imaginary Faith* (*Von dem getichten glauben*), written in quick succession in late 1523 and issued early in 1524.

In the *Protestation* and *Imaginary Faith* the social and political views that would mark Müntzer’s three later and larger theological writings go unexpressed. Hence they were completely unobjectionable to the ripening nonresistance of a Grebel and Mantz. The polemic against Luther, though mild and indirect in comparison with the later writings, is clear enough to lead the Zurichers to associate Müntzer’s pamphlets with Carlstadt’s literary campaign against ‘the sparing of the weak’.⁸ The critique of infant baptism in the *Protestation* must be regarded as an occasional topic in the context of Müntzer’s theological writings,⁹ but it touched the sorest point in the ripening opposition between Zwingli and the Zurich radicals. Hence these works were made to order for the somewhat superficial and ephemeral impact of Müntzer upon early Swiss Anabaptism (Müntzer’s legacy had a much stronger p. 205 influence on early Anabaptism in South and Central Germany and Austria¹⁰).

Nevertheless, indirect light is shed on the piety of the future Swiss Brethren by these two theological works of Müntzer, which (unlike his liturgical experiments and his political activism) they appear to have approved uncritically. At the same time their relative detachment from the day-to-day politics of the Allstedt Reformation and the clarity and sobriety of their anti-Wittenberg polemic gives us a more or less unclouded glimpse into the theological mind of Thomas Müntzer. The *Protestation* and *Imaginary Faith* show us the framework that received all the rich, experiential matter of his later

(Ludwigshafen 1925), 48–64, and most recently and conclusively by Calvin A. Pater, ‘Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt as the Intellectual Founder of Anabaptism’ (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Harvard Divinity School, 1977).

⁶ Wenger, 24–25, 32–35.

⁷ Ibid., 14–17, 28–29.

⁸ Ibid., 16–17, 38–39. Carlstadt’s tract against sparing was published in late 1524 in Basel with the assistance of the Zurich radicals. For the German text see Erich Hertzsch, ed., *Karlstadts Schriften aus den Jahren 1523–1525* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1956), I, 73–97. An excerpted English translation appears in Ronald J. Sider, ed., *Karlstadt’s Battle with Luther. Documents in a Liberal-Radical Debate* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 49–71.

⁹ See Wolfgang Ullmann’s introduction to the *Protestation* in Siegfried Bräuer and Wolfgang Ullmann, eds., *Thomas Müntzer. Theologische Schriften aus dem Jahr 1523* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1975) (hereafter Bräuer and Ullmann), 25–27. Ullmann comments that seemingly opposed comments on infant baptism in Müntzer’s writings show ‘... dass für Müntzer hier keine zentrale Frage vorlag’.

¹⁰ Gottfried Seebass, ‘Müntzers Erbe: Werk, Leben und Theologie des Hans Hut (gestorben 1527)’, unpublished Habilitationsschrift, Erlangen University, 1972; Werner O. Packull, *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement 1525–1531* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald, 1977).

career—the name-calling denunciations of Luther, the rejection of secular authority, the apocalyptic messianism.¹¹

In March, 1523 Müntzer began his pastorate in Allstedt and on the Easter immediately following he had introduced his German liturgy. By the fall he had clashed with the neighbouring Catholic prince, Ernst of Mansfeld, who resisted his subjects' desire to visit Müntzer's sermons and services. Theological differences with the Wittenberg Reformers had already been the object of letters by Müntzer to Melancthon and Luther; and now Luther was suggesting that the Allstedt pastor present himself for an examination of his doctrinal soundness. From November 4 to 14 the Electoral Saxon court was in Allstedt underway to the Nuremberg Reichstag. Luther at this juncture initiated a two-day doctrinal discussion between Johann Lang, who came from Erfurt for the purpose, and the Allstedt pastors, Müntzer and Simon Haferitz. In the context of this discussion Müntzer decided to compose and publish a work outlining his critique of the Wittenberg Reformation. Thus the *Protestation*, through which he aimed 'to bring the teaching of the evangelical teachers into a better form, and at the same time not to despise our slow, backward Roman brothers', was prepared with a view to publication shortly after the New Year, 1524. Also on the occasion of the Saxon court's stay in Allstedt, and probably p. 206 in connection with the theological discussion with Lang, Georg Spalatin, court preacher and Luther's friend, presented Müntzer with eleven concise, Latin questions about his understanding of the meaning and substance of 'faith'. Müntzer responded with a written statement which he transmitted to Spalatin through Hans Zeiss, commander of the Allstedt castle. The statement, together with a letter to Zeiss, dated December 2, 1523, was published as the *Imaginary Faith*. It was a tighter exposition of many of the themes of the *Protestation* and covered some new ground as well. About half the size of the *Protestation*, it was apparently the more popular; we know that it went through three printings in 1524. Müntzer seems to have written the *Imaginary Faith* with a finished draft of the *Protestation* already before him. There is extensive overlapping in their content.¹²

ON THE IMAGINARY FAITH

On the Imaginary¹³ Faith, with Reference to the Recent 'Protestation'
Issued by Thomas Müntzer,

¹¹ Certainly there is a hint of apocalyptic messianism in Müntzer's marginal reference to [Malachi 3](#) at the beginning of the *Protestation*, and, of course, it permeated the Prague Manifesto of 1521. See Walter Elliger, *Thomas Müntzer. Leben und Werke* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 395. It should be noted, however, that Elliger explains the significance of Müntzer's citation of [Malachi 3](#) with a reference to the last verse of [Malachi 4](#)!

¹² This view of the priority of the *Protestation* to the *Imaginary Faith* is based on Elliger, 394–416. Bräuer and Ullmann placed the *imaginary Faith* first, but Bräuer, 'Müntzerforschung von 1965 bis 1975', *Lutherjahrbuch*, XLIV (1977), 133, n.18, reversed this stance and acknowledged himself in agreement with Elliger's position. Spalatin's questions appear in Elliger, 404, and in English translation in Gordon Rupp, *Patterns of Reformation* (London: Epworth, 1969), 190–91. Bräuer has contributed the most detailed and recent account of the emergence of the two writings, discovering new sources not previously used by Müntzer scholars: Siegfried Bräuer, 'Die Vorgeschichte von Luthers "Ein Brief an die Fürsten zu Sachsen von dem aufrührerischen Geist"', *Lutherjahrbuch*, XLVII (1980), 47–51.

¹³ Ullmann suggests that the title, *Gedichtete Glauben*, was fashioned from the Vulgate version of [2 Timothy 1:5](#), in which real faith is described as *fide non ficta*. Hence the *gedichtete* faith is the opposite of real faith. Following Ullmann's rendering of the title as *Vom eingebildeten Glauben*, and given the relatively gentle polemic of this tract, I think 'imaginary faith' is a nuance apter than 'spurious', 'false', 'fictitious', or 'phoney' faith. See Bräuer and Ullmann, 16.

Pastor at Allstedt. 1524.
Against the imaginary Faith of Christendom

^aChristian faith is a sure reliance, a casting oneself upon the word and promise of Christ.^a
^bIf someone is to hear this word with an honest, unfeigning heart, his ear must be cleaned for hearing—from the wax of anxieties and pleasures.^b ^cFor just as little as a field can yield a large [p. 207](#) harvest without going under the plow, so little can someone say that he is a Christian if he has not previously, through his cross, been receptively awaiting the word and work of God.^c ^dThrough that kind of anticipation the elect friend of God submits himself to the Word.^d ^eHe is not one of those imaginary hearers¹⁴ but a zealous pupil of his Master, whom he studies with unsparing diligence, so as to be like him in every respect, according to the limit of his capacities.^e

II

^fWhen a person hears or sees something that points him to Christ, he should accept it as a marvellous witness with which to chase out, kill and crush his unbelief. To this extent he views the entire Holy Scripture as a two edged sword.^f ^gFor everything that is therein is always there for the purpose rather of killing us than of making us alive.^g ^hAn untested person who wants to brag about the Word of God will not produce anything other than vanities.^h ⁱAn elect friend of God cannot come to faith so easily, because God has tempted his elect to the uttermost from the very beginning, not sparing his only Son,ⁱ ^jso that he could be the proper goal of salvation and point to the single narrow way which can eternally not be found by the debauched scribes.^j ^kThe people who boast about it so much are fraudulent in their faith and full of imaginings,^k ^lunless indeed they can give an account of the origin of their faith as occurred with all the figures about whom we read in the

^a [Is. 53](#); [Rom. 10](#).

^a [Is. 53](#); [Rom. 10](#).

^b [Mt. 13](#); [Lk. 8](#); Mk4.

^b [Mt. 13](#); [Lk. 8](#); Mk4.

^c [Lk. 9](#) [12](#); [1 Tim. 1](#); [Ps. 130](#).

^c [Lk. 9](#) [12](#); [1 Tim. 1](#); [Ps. 130](#).

^d [Jas. 1](#); [Mt. 23](#).

^d [Jas. 1](#); [Mt. 23](#).

^e [Lk. 6](#); [Jn. 13](#); [Eph. 4](#); [Rom. 8](#).

¹⁴ getichten zuhörer: the reference is to Luther's stress on hearing the preached Word.

^e [Lk. 6](#); [Jn. 13](#); [Eph. 4](#); [Rom. 8](#).

^f [Jn. 1](#); [Ps. 19](#); [Rom. 5](#); [Heb. 4](#).

^f [Jn. 1](#); [Ps. 19](#); [Rom. 5](#); [Heb. 4](#).

^g [2 Cor. 3](#); [Deut. 32](#); [1 Sam. 2](#).

^g [2 Cor. 3](#); [Deut. 32](#); [1 Sam. 2](#).

^h [Eccl. 34](#); [Ps. 1](#).

^h [Eccl. 34](#); [Ps. 1](#).

ⁱ [Prov. 25](#); [1 Pet. 1](#); Book of [Wisdom 3](#), [Rom. 8](#).

ⁱ [Prov. 25](#); [1 Pet. 1](#); Book of [Wisdom 3](#), [Rom. 8](#).

^j [1 Pet. 2](#); [Mt. 7](#) [8](#) [9](#) [23](#).

^j [1 Pet. 2](#); [Mt. 7](#) [8](#) [9](#) [23](#).

^k Book of [Wisdom 5](#); [1 Pet. 1](#) [3](#); [Eccl. 19](#).

^k Book of [Wisdom 5](#); [1 Pet. 1](#) [3](#); [Eccl. 19](#).

^l [1 Tim. 3](#); [2 Tim. 3](#): *Voluptatum amatores corrupti sensu* (lovers of pleasure are corrupted in judgement. See [2 Tim. 3:4](#)).

Bible.^l ^mIt is impossible to call such mad and arrogant persons rational heathens, let alone Christians. We must be as wary of people like these, who disguise themselves as angels of light, as of the Devil himself.^m **P. 208**

III

ⁿGod let Abraham become miserable and forsaken, so that he would rest his security on no creature but on God alone. Therefore he was tormented with God's promise.ⁿ ^oJust as [forsakeness] begins immediately before the promise, he was tormented by having to wander into a strange land with a farfetched consolation,^o which seemed far removed according to the light of nature—^pas St. Stephen cast it up to the delicate, pointy-fingered scribes in the Acts of the Apostles.^p ^qDamned persons always want to be extremely self-centred and nevertheless to comprehend the utterly forsaken Christ.^q [Genesis 12](#) must be seen in the context of [Genesis 10](#) and [11](#). There, taking the three chapters together, it is shown how Abraham after great trouble and misery became worthy to see the day of Jesus Christ. ^rFrom the beginning on God has used the same method. If the light of nature was so severely extirpated in Abraham, what then must happen within us?^r

IV

^sMoses, who demonstrates the recognition of the false light of nature through the Law, did not want to believe the living promise of God.^s For he first had to gain a very sharp recognition of the unbelief within him, ^tso that he might rely upon God without imaginings and know with certainty that the Devil was not pulling the wool over his eyes. Moses would have been able to take God for a devil had he not recognized the cunning of the creature and God's simplicity,^t ^uin line with the order established in God and the

^l [1 Tim. 3](#); [2 Tim. 3](#): *Voluptatum amatores corrupti sensu* (lovers of pleasure are corrupted in judgement. See [2 Tim. 3:4](#)).

^m [Rom. 15](#) [:4]: *Quecunque* (Whatever ...); *Comparatio* (for comparison, see [Jer. 31](#); [2 Cor. 2](#)).

^m [Rom. 15](#) [:4]: *Quecunque* (Whatever ...); *Comparatio* (for comparison, see [Jer. 31](#); [2 Cor. 2](#)).

ⁿ [Rom. 4](#); [Gen. 12](#), [13](#), [14](#), 22; *per totam scripturam* (throughout the Scripture).

ⁿ [Rom. 4](#); [Gen. 12](#), [13](#), [14](#), 22; *per totam scripturam* (throughout the Scripture).

^o [Ps. 36](#), [119](#).

^o [Ps. 36](#), [119](#).

^p [Acts 7](#).

^p [Acts 7](#).

^q Book of [Wisdom 2](#); [Phil. 3](#); [Eph. 3](#); Judas preached Christ and had the money bag around his neck: [Jn. 12](#).

^q Book of [Wisdom 2](#); [Phil. 3](#); [Eph. 3](#); Judas preached Christ and had the money bag around his neck: [Jn. 12](#).

^r [1 Cor. 2](#); [Lk. 2](#), 22; [Ps. 1](#); [Mt. 5](#); [Jn. 8](#).

^r [1 Cor. 2](#); [Lk. 2](#), 22; [Ps. 1](#); [Mt. 5](#); [Jn. 8](#).

^s [Rom. 7](#).

^s [Rom. 7](#).

^t *Jn. ultimo; Zacharias, Elizabet, Maria, omnes difficiles ad credendum* (Zacharias, Elizabeth and Mary all had difficulties in coming to faith).

^t *Jn. ultimo; Zacharias, Elizabet, Maria, omnes difficiles ad credendum* (Zacharias, Elizabeth and Mary all had difficulties in coming to faith).

^u [Gen. 1](#).

creatures.^{u 15} ^vEven when the whole world accepts something as from God, it cannot quiet the poor in spirit unless he comes to know it after tribulation.^v **P. 209**

V

^wLet every pious, upright elect person take a brief look at the Bible^w ^xunmoved by any particular personal objective.^x ^yHe will find that all the fathers, the patriarchs, prophets, and particularly the apostles, have come with great difficulty to faith.^y ^yNone wanted to burst into it like our crazy, debauched swine, who are terrified in the face of the hurricane, the roaring waves and the whole water of wisdom.^y ^aFor their consciences mark well that they ultimately will go down to destruction in such a storm.^a ^bThus with all their promises they are like a foolish man who builds upon a sand foundation. Then all structures collapse.^b

VI

^cThe messengers of God had heard the bearer of the Gospel himself; and Christ told Peter that neither flesh nor blood revealed [that] to him, but God himself.^c ¹⁶But they could not hold fast to a single promise without becoming deeply embarrassed and disgracefully falling, so that their unbelief could be probed so deeply. ^dFor when he arose all of them together would not believe that it was he. They thought it was a ghost or a deception.^d ^eAnd we untested men think so much of ourselves that we have recourse to an imaginary faith and to contrived mercifulness, and take a natural promise or commitment and want to storm heaven with it.^e ^fOh no, dearest Christians, let us use the Bible for the purpose for which it was made, to kill, as we said above, and not to make alive like the living Word

^u [Gen. 1.](#)

¹⁵ ordnung, die in Got und creaturn gesatz ist; see Hans-Jürgen Goertz, 'The Mystic with the Hammer', *MQR*, L (1976), 96–98.

^v [Lk. 4](#); [Is. 66](#).

^v [Lk. 4](#); [Is. 66](#).

^w [1 Cor. 10](#).

^w [1 Cor. 10](#).

^x [Eph. 2](#).

^x [Eph. 2](#).

^y [Mt. 8, 11](#).

^y [Mt. 8, 11](#).

^y [Mt. 8, 11](#).

^y [Mt. 8, 11](#).

^a [Eccl. 8](#).

^a [Eccl. 8](#).

^b [Prov. 10](#); [Mt. 7](#).

^b [Prov. 10](#); [Mt. 7](#).

^c [Mt. 16](#).

^c [Mt. 16](#).

¹⁶ [Matt. 16:17](#).

^d Lk. *ultimo* [[Lk. 24](#)].

^d Lk. *ultimo* [[Lk. 24](#)].

^e [Job 15](#); [Eccl. 10](#); [Is. 61](#).

^e [Job 15](#); [Eccl. 10](#); [Is. 61](#).

^f [2 Cor. 3](#); [Ps. 119](#).

when an empty soul hears it.^f ^gLet us not take a piece from here, another one from somewhere else, but bring everything together into a unity according to the teaching of the Spirit and not of the flesh, which must be awaited in all **P. 210** parts of the Scripture, so that it might console and terrify.^g ^hWhere the fraudulent faith is not uncovered to its very bottom, people always accept the outer Word, but in the storm the fool finds it wanting.^h ⁱThus people must be brought to the point that they are absolutely perplexed and awestruck, if they are to be freed from their imaginary faith and properly instructed in the upright faith.ⁱ

VII

^jTo a preacher who has experienced justification the words of God are not put into his mouth with honied sweetness and hypocrisy.^j ^kRather they come with a burning inward earnest zeal to uproot, to break and to scatter the imaginary Christians, to destroy every bit of their villainous faith, which they know from hearsay or have stolen from the books of men like spiteful thieves.^k

VIII

^lSo long as the poor, miserable, pitiful, woebegotten Christendom does not recognize her hurt, she is not to be helped.^l ^mSo long as she will not permit the genuine faith to strip away her imaginary faith like a veil, she is neither to be counselled nor helped.^m ⁿThe inadequacy of everybody in this realm is that no one wants to be like Turks, heathen, Jews and all other unbelievers in the origin of his faith.ⁿ ^oRather everyone crowns¹⁷ himself and dresses himself up with his faith and works, and yet knows the foundation and basis of neither the one nor the other. ^oHence our coarse, loutish fathers committed the whole world, excepting only themselves, to the Devil, rendering account to no one and thereby giving rise to all sorts of sects and schisms.^o ^pFor people became divided mostly over the

^f [2 Cor. 3](#); [Ps. 119](#).

^g [Is. 28](#); [1 Cor. 2](#); [Lk. 2](#); [1 Sam. 2](#).

^g [Is. 28](#); [1 Cor. 2](#); [Lk. 2](#); [1 Sam. 2](#).

^h [Lk. 8](#).

^h [Lk. 8](#).

ⁱ [Mt. 13](#); [Mk. 4](#); [Ps. 119](#).

ⁱ [Mt. 13](#); [Mk. 4](#); [Ps. 119](#).

^j [Jer. 1](#); [Jn. 2](#); [Ps. 67](#).

^j [Jer. 1](#); [Jn. 2](#); [Ps. 67](#).

^k [Jer. 23](#).

^k [Jer. 23](#).

^l [Jn. 9](#).

^l [Jn. 9](#).

^m [Is. 6](#); [Lk. 8](#); [Mt. 13](#); [Mk. 4](#).

^m [Is. 6](#); [Lk. 8](#); [Mt. 13](#); [Mk. 4](#).

ⁿ [Mt. 9](#), [18](#), [35](#) [*sic!*]; [Lk. 19](#); [1 Pet. 3](#).

ⁿ [Mt. 9](#), [18](#), [35](#) [*sic!*]; [Lk. 19](#); [1 Pet. 3](#).

¹⁷ 'nutzet' in the original print. *Müntzer Schriften*, 221: 'nutzet', in which case the translation, according to Bräuer and Ullmann, 20, should be 'exerts' ('strengt sich an').

^o [1 Tim. 1](#); Rom. *passim*; [Lk. 18](#); [Acts 10](#).

^o [1 Tim. 1](#); Rom. *passim*; [Lk. 18](#); [Acts 10](#).

^p [Rom. 11](#).

rites and ceremonies of the Church, regardless of whether the faith was imaginary or genuine.^p **P. 211**

IX

^qTo help miserable, coarse Christendom out of such an offensive abomination, it will first be most important to hearken to an earnest preacher, who with John the Baptist sends his cries of pity and complaint into the desolate, mad, raging hearts of men.^q ^rHe seeks that they should learn the manner of the work of God as they become receptive to the Word of God after repeated stirrings. Then the wellspring of salvation is proclaimed,^r ^sthe Son of God, like a mild lamb that opens not its mouth as it is slaughtered and thus has borne the sins of the world.^s ^tThus we should realize that we, like him, as sheep of our slaughter all the day long,^t ¹⁸ ^udo not grumble and growl in our suffering like whimpering dogs, but behave like the sheep of his pasture, whom he admits with the salt of his wisdom in suffering and in no other way.^u

X

^vThe sheep are poisoned through bad pasture but nourished through the salt. That a sweet Christ is preached to the fleshly world is the strongest poison to be given to sheep of Christ since the beginning.^v ^wFor to the degree that the person imbibes this poison he wants to be godlike, while at the same time the very last thing that he wants and desires is to become Christlike.^w ^xMoreover, he is least of all like himself, but, like a salamander or a leopard, inconstant in everything that he undertakes.^x ^yFor this reason Christ pointedly said, 'My sheep hear my voice and do not follow the voice of strangers'.^y ¹⁹ ^zHe is a stranger who allows the path to eternal life to become overgrown, lets the thorns and thistles

^p [Rom. 11](#).

^q [Ps. 63, 119](#); [Jn. 3](#); [Is. 40](#).

^q [Ps. 63, 119](#); [Jn. 3](#); [Is. 40](#).

^r [Ps. 30, 36, 69](#); [Jn. 4](#).

^r [Ps. 30, 36, 69](#); [Jn. 4](#).

^s [Is. 53](#); [Jn. 1](#).

^s [Is. 53](#); [Jn. 1](#).

^t [Rom. 8](#); [Ps. 44](#).

^t [Rom. 8](#); [Ps. 44](#).

¹⁸ schaff unsers todtschlaens den gantzen tag durch und durch; see Müntzer to Luther, July 9, 1523, in *Müntzer Schriften*, 390: *ovis occisionis tota die*; [Ps. 44:22](#) and [Rom. 8:36](#). See Wenger, 28: 'Rechte gleubige Christen sind ... schaff der schlachtung ...'.

^u [Is. 5](#); [Mt. 20](#); [Ps. 95](#).

^u [Is. 5](#); [Mt. 20](#); [Ps. 95](#).

^v [Ezek. 34](#); [Is. 5](#): *dicunt amarum dulce* (they call the bitter sweet ... See [Is. 5:20](#)).

^v [Ezek. 34](#); [Is. 5](#): *dicunt amarum dulce* (they call the bitter sweet ... See [Is. 5:20](#)).

^w *oppositum* (contrary); [2 Cor. 1](#).

^w *oppositum* (contrary); [2 Cor. 1](#).

^x *pardus* (panther or leopard): [Jer. 13](#), etc.

^x *pardus* (panther or leopard): [Jer. 13](#), etc.

^y [Jn. 10](#).

^y [Jn. 10](#).

¹⁹ See [John 10:5, 27](#).

^z [Prov. 10](#); Book of [Wisdom 5](#).

remain^z and says 'Believe, believe, hold firm, firm, with a strong, strong faith, so that you have something secure to hang onto'.^a **P. 212**

XI

^bYou may not climb in the window, may have no other foundation of faith than the whole Christ and not the half.^b ^cWhoever does not want to take the bitter Christ will eat himself to death on honey.^c ^dChrist is a cornerstone: just as the Master Workman polished him, so he must do the same with us, so that we are made suitable for the true edifice of life.^d ^eNot even the smallest portion²⁰ may be lacking in the whole life,^e ^fso that each Christian must have the appearance [of Christ] through and through²¹ and develop the greatest likeness to him, according to his talent and capacity.^f ^gFor whoever does not die with Christ cannot rise with him. How can he, then, live in truth, if he never, ever, has stripped off the old coat?^g ^hHence those who console before they bring distress are thieves and murderers; they want to accomplish something before Christ comes and don't know what they are affirming or denying.^h

XII

ⁱNo more rapturous love did Christ, unchangeably [one] with his Father, show to his elect that that he diligently strove to make them like sheep, suitable for the kitchen,ⁱ in contrast to the damned, who can only brood about how they will be driven away, killed and their memory extirpated from the earth. ^jAnd whoever contemplates the Lamb in this way, and how it takes away the sins of the world, will say: 'I have heard with my own ears how the old fathers of the Bible dealt with God and God with them. No one became one with God until he had triumphed through his suffering, assigned to him from eternity'.^j ^kThus one

^z [Prov. 10](#); Book of [Wisdom 5](#).

^a [Prov. 9](#).

^a [Prov. 9](#).

^b [Jn. 10](#); [1 Cor. 1](#), [2](#).

^b [Jn. 10](#); [1 Cor. 1](#), [2](#).

^c [Prov. 5](#).

^c [Prov. 5](#).

^d [Ps. 118](#); [Mt. 21](#); [Eph. 2](#).

^d [Ps. 118](#); [Mt. 21](#); [Eph. 2](#).

^e [Mt. 5](#).

²⁰ nicht ein meytlin (a *Meit* is the smallest copper coin).

^e [Mt. 5](#).

^f [Rom. 8](#).

²¹ ein ider crist durch und durch anzusehen werde; see Bräuer and Ullmann, 21: 'ein jeder Christ durch und dutch [wie Christus] anzusehen werde'. The context of the sentence suggests an omission.

^f [Rom. 8](#).

^g [Rom. 5](#); [Lk. 6](#).

^g [Rom. 5](#); [Lk. 6](#).

^h [Jn. 10](#); [1 T\[im?\]](#) [1](#).

^h [Jn. 10](#); [1 T\[im?\]](#) [1](#).

ⁱ [1 Jn. 33](#) [sic!]; [Rom. 8](#); Book of [Wisdom 2](#); [Ps. 44](#).

ⁱ [1 Jn. 33](#) [sic!]; [Rom. 8](#); Book of [Wisdom 2](#); [Ps. 44](#).

^j *Canticum electorum* (song of the elect); [Gen. 32](#); *Finis cantici* (end of the song).

^j *Canticum electorum* (song of the elect); [Gen. 32](#); *Finis cantici* (end of the song).

^k [Ps. 54](#).

attains God's radiance, in the light, to the light.^k ^lThe Lord is **P. 213** referring to this when he says, 'No one can snatch out of my hand the sheep whom my Father has given to me'.^l ²² ^mThe interpretation of this passage is the pasture of the sheep, which is written down in heaven.^m ⁿFor after all the slaughtering it says, 'Oh, Lord, awake. Why do you turn your face away from me? Help me for your name's sake, so that my feet are grounded upon the rock. Then I will say: You did it alone. Then I will not permit my lips to be bound shut from proclaiming in your great Church the righteousness which began with you alone'.ⁿ

XIII

^oThe genuine Christendom which is foreknown for eternal life is built on such a foundation,^o ^pso that one can learn to be on guard and do away with the leaven of the villainous men of learning, who make the pure Word of God into a leaven with their worm-eaten belly-aching.^p ^qFor all their teaching brings it about that people brag falsely and presumptuously with untested faith and think that they are manly enough to face all tribulations with their promises, but they do not teach how someone can arrive at such a point.^q

XIV

Look carefully, you elect brother, at [Matthew 16](#) in all its words. ^rThere you will find that no one can believe in Christ unless he first becomes like him.^r ^sMoved through the unbelief which he discovers, the elect man forsakes his entire imaginary faith,^s ^teverything that he has learned, heard or read through the Scriptures. For he sees that an external witness can produce nothing real²³ in him, rather it merely serves the purpose for which it was created.^t ^uTherefore he does not turn to all the talk of inexperienced men, rather he is eager for revelation,^u ^vto say like Peter, who ventures forth before everyone, 'I know **P.**

^k [Ps. 54.](#)

^l [In. 10.](#)

^l [In. 10.](#)

²² [John 10:29.](#)

^m [Ps. 119;](#) [Lk. 10.](#)

^m [Ps. 119;](#) [Lk. 10.](#)

ⁿ [Ps. 40;](#) [Is. 26.](#)

ⁿ [Ps. 40;](#) [Is. 26.](#)

^o [Eph. 2;](#) [Rom. 9.](#)

^o [Eph. 2;](#) [Rom. 9.](#)

^p [Mt. 7, 16, 23;](#) [2 Cor. 2.](#)

^p [Mt. 7, 16, 23;](#) [2 Cor. 2.](#)

^q [Ps. 49.](#)

^q [Ps. 49.](#)

^r [In. 12.](#)

^r [In. 12.](#)

^s [Mt. 7;](#) [Jer. 8.](#)

^s [Mt. 7;](#) [Jer. 8.](#)

^t [Rom. 8 \[:16\]:](#) *Spiritus reddet testimonium etc.* (the Spirit bears witness ...).

²³ kein wesen machen; see Bräuer and Ullmann, 23.

^t [Rom. 8 \[:16\]:](#) *Spiritus reddet testimonium etc.* (the Spirit bears witness ...).

^u [2 Cor. 3;](#) [Mt. 7;](#) [2 Pet. 2.](#)

^u [2 Cor. 3;](#) [Mt. 7;](#) [2 Pet. 2.](#)

^v [Mt. 14, 16.](#)

214 for a fact that Christ is the Son of the living God'.^{v24} ^wThen the unbelief concealed in my flesh and blood is overcome [although] very partially, through the desires, which eat their way through and permeate the mustard seed and the good leaven and break through unbelief everywhere.^w ^xA person must have undergone despair and the very deepest contradiction. He must first have suffered hell if he is to guard himself against the deception of the devouring gates [of hell].^x ^yThe damned and the elect do not accept the same thing.^y ^zThe godless man is grateful beyond measure to accept the Scriptures.^z Where somebody else suffers for him, there he builds a strong faith. But if it is necessary to take a good look at the Lamb who opens up the book, then he doesn't want to lose his soul, doesn't want to become like the Lamb, but wants in his sensual manner to make do with clear texts. That is false.

Even if the whole Scripture would be explained in a human sense to the learned man, he couldn't cope with it, even if he burst apart. ^aHe must wait until it is opened up to him with the key of David on the wine-press, where all his assumed manner is crushed.^a ^bThus he becomes so dispirited that he can find no faith within him, except that he would like to believe rightly. That, then, is the faith which becomes as small as a mustard seed. Then the man must see to it, as he endures the work of God, that he²⁵ grow from day to day in the knowledge of God.^b ^cThen the man is taught solely by God, alone together with him, and by no creature.^c What all creatures know is for him bitter gall, for this reason, because it is a perverted way, from which may God preserve and save all his elect, once they have fallen into it. Let Christ grant that. Amen.

To his dear brother, Hans Zeiss, commander of the Allstedt castle: One thing, dear brother was forgotten in my answer to the contention that suffering should be attributed to Christ alone, as if we would not need to suffer anything, now that he has truly suffered for our sins. It is worth observing out of what sort of delicacy such unseemly rest and **p. 215** unjustified passivity is revealed to us. ^dAdam is a model of Christ for harm, Christ the opposite.^d ^eThe disobedience of the creatures is made up for by the obedience of the Word, which becomes flesh in a natural sense, just as our fleshly nature in the part, through the effect of faith, must in part fall away, as it happened to the whole Christ, our head.^e ^fTherefore Christ expiated the entire harm of Adam so that the parts should cleave to the

^v [Mt. 14, 16](#).

²⁴ See [Matt. 16:16](#).

^w [Mt. 7](#) [*sic*; should be [Mt. 17](#)]; [1 Sam. 2](#).

^w [Mt. 7](#) [*sic*; should be [Mt. 17](#)]; [1 Sam. 2](#).

^x *Contrarium* [Ps. 24](#); take special notice.

^x *Contrarium* [Ps. 24](#); take special notice.

^y [Ps. 49](#).

^y [Ps. 49](#).

^z [Is. 29](#).

^z [Is. 29](#).

^a [Ps. 40](#); [Is. 22](#).

^a [Ps. 40](#); [Is. 22](#).

^b [Lk. 4, 17](#); [Is. 61](#); [2 Cor. 4](#).

²⁵ I am assuming, like Bräuer and Ullmann, 23, that the 'es' in the original text is a misprint for 'er'.

^b [Lk. 4, 17](#); [Is. 61](#); [2 Cor. 4](#).

^c [Is. 54](#); [Jn. 6](#).

^c [Is. 54](#); [Jn. 6](#).

^d [Rom. 5](#).

^d [Rom. 5](#).

^e [Eph. 2](#).

^e [Eph. 2](#).

^f [Col. 1](#).

whole, as the holy messenger of God says clearly: 'I fulfil that which is still lacking to the sufferings of Christ; the Church suffers as his body'.^f ²⁶Paul could not suffer for the churches except as a member awaiting his duty. ^gWe must all follow in the footsteps of Christ, armed with such thoughts.^g ^hHere no gloss helps men who think to overcome the works righteous in a material way,^h ⁱand in fact poison the world still worse with imaginary faith than did the others with loutish works.ⁱ ^jHence, because they are incapable of making proper distinctions, they are still *neophiti* (untested persons)^j ^kwho should not be pastors of souls but still for a good long while remain *chatecumini* (diligent pupils of the work of God) and not teach until they themselves are taught by God.^k

This writing of mine is still unsuitable for showing to the mad world. I must still think to explain this writing in all its chapters with my [citation of] Scripture chapters, for the ruination of the fleshly scribes. For among them the imaginary flesh has permitted all sorts of knavery.^l Therefore it cannot now be printed, because this would amount to sending it out unprotected against those who are, in their own opinion, well armed. You should know, too, that they attribute this teaching to Abbot Joachim and with great mockery call it an 'Eternal Gospel'. I hold Abbot Joachim in great respect. I have read him only on Jeremiah. But my teaching is much superior. I accept it not from him but from the utterance of God, as I want to prove at an appropriate time on the basis of the whole Bible. Let the matter rest for the moment [p. 216](#) and let us at all times faithfully preserve copies of our writings. Given, the Wednesday after St. Andrew's²⁷ in 1523.

Thomas Müntzer, your brother in the Lord.

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Is There Ancestor Worship in the Old Testament?

Andrew Chiu

^f [Col. 1.](#)

²⁶ See [Col. 1:24.](#)

^g [1 Pet. 2, 4.](#)

^g [1 Pet. 2, 4.](#)

^h [Rom. 4.](#)

^h [Rom. 4.](#)

ⁱ [Mt. 5;](#) [1 Tim. 1;](#) [2 Tim. 1.](#)

ⁱ [Mt. 5;](#) [1 Tim. 1;](#) [2 Tim. 1.](#)

^j [Is. 5.](#)

^j [Is. 5.](#)

^k [In. 6;](#) [Is. 54;](#) [Jer. 31.](#)

^k [In. 6;](#) [Is. 54;](#) [Jer. 31.](#)

^l [1 Cor. 2;](#) [Mt. 7.](#)

^l [1 Cor. 2;](#) [Mt. 7.](#)

²⁷ December 2.

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(Editors)

Ancestor worship is worship directed to deceased parents or forefathers. The cult is based on the universal belief in the existence of an immaterial part of man. The deceased is believed to have the same kindly interest in the affairs of the living as when alive and to interfere in the course of events for the welfare of the family or clan. The deceased is able to protect his or her relatives, help them in war, give them success in their undertakings, and therefore, demand their continued service, reverence, and sacrifice. Otherwise, the deceased may bring sickness, storms, calamities or other misfortunes upon them, if the worship of him or her is neglected.

Thus it is evident that the motives of ancestor worship are not only filial piety, but also fear of the deceased spirits. For ancient Romans, ancestor worship was a sort of family religion. Masks or images which embodied the *manes* (the spirits of the deceased) who had become gods of the lower world were set up in the homes. Altars were erected, sacrifices were made, and prayers were offered to them in the same way as to the *penates* (the protecting spirits of the household). Even today the Chinese practise ancestor worship wherever they have settled. Tablets of wood, some with only a piece of red paper on them, bearing the name and genealogy of the deceased are found in many homes; incense and spirit money and objects are burned before them, prayers for protection and/or assistance are also offered. Often, an entire room or hall, or even a separate building, is set aside for this purpose.

Was ancestor worship practised in the Old Testament? If the Old Testament refers only to the time span from creation to the New Testament the answer to this question is in the affirmative. If it refers to the people and the land of Israel, or to the canonical books which are accepted by both the Jews and the Christians, the picture might be different. p. 218

FAMILY LIFE IN ISRAEL

It is not the purpose of this paper to give a full treatment of the family life in Israel. We intend to discuss here only those practices which may relate to ancestors. The characteristics of the Israelite family have been dealt with thoroughly by Roland de Vaux.¹ Although there are some indications in the Old Testament of fratriarchate,² and matriarchate³ practices, yet, Israel was basically a patriarchal society.

¹ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Social Institution* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company 1965), pp.19–21.

² Fratriarchate means the eldest brother is the head of the family. See for example, Laban plays a role in arrangement of the marriage of his sister Rebecca ([Gen. 24](#)), Dinah's brothers enter into deliberations with Shechem ([Gen. 34](#)) and Joseph's brethren sold him to the Ishmaelites ([Gen. 37](#)). Cf. also Ignatius Hunt, *The World of the Patriarchs* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), pp.64–65.

³ Matriarchate means a state or stage of social evolution in which descent is reckoned only in the female line, with all children belonging to the mother's clan. For instance, some authors argued that in the case of the marriage of Samson to Timna the wife does not leave her clan but brings her husband into it ([Judg. 14](#)). Also the two sons of Joseph, who were born of Egyptian wives, were not acknowledged as children of Israel until they had been adopted by Jacob ([Gen. 48](#)). And Amnon and Tamar could have married each other,

For the Israelites, as with many other peoples, the family consists of those who are united by common blood and by a common dwelling place. The father is the head of the family. He has the right to arrange the children's marriage just as stated in the Code of Hammurabi (Sections 155 and 159) and an essential condition of marriage is a contract based on the agreement of the fathers of the two contracting parties or on the groom-to-be and the father of the bride-to-be.⁴ So Abraham sent his servant to choose a wife for Isaac ([Gen. 24](#)), Judah arranged the marriage of his first-born ([Gen. 38:6](#)), Caleb decided on his daughter's marriage ([Jos. 15:16](#)) and Saul did the same ([1 Sam. 18:17, 19, 21, 27; 25:44](#)). Lot even suggested that the men of Sodom might abuse his virgin daughters rather than abuse his guests ([Gen. 19:1-11](#)). Furthermore, a vow made by a girl or married woman needs the consent of the father or husband to be valid. If the consent is withheld, the vow is null and void ([Num. 30:4-17](#)).

Although the mother gave her children the first rudiments of education ([Prov. 1:8; 6:20](#)), the primary task of educating the children was entrusted to the father. One of his most sacred duties was to teach his p. 219 son religious truth and national traditions ([Ex. 10:2; 12:26-27; 13:8; Deut. 4:9, 6:9, 20-25; 32:7, 46](#)). Of course, the father was responsible for his son's professional education as well.

In Israel, only sons had a right to the inheritance. Daughters did not inherit except when the father had no male heirs. If a man died without children, the property passed to his male kinsmen on his father's side in the following order: his brothers, his father's brothers, his nearest relative in the clan ([Num. 27:1-11](#); cf. [Num. 36:6-9](#)). The eldest son was to receive a double share of his father's wealth ([Deut. 21:17](#)). This was why the Israelites wanted mainly sons in order to perpetuate the family line and fortune and to preserve the ancestral inheritance.

This may also explain why Israelites practised the levirate system.⁵ It was regarded as a tragedy for an Israelite man to die without any children, so the levirate system required his brother to take his widow in marriage and have children by her ([Deut. 25:5-10](#); see also [Gen. 38](#) and [Ruth 1](#) and [4](#)). A special term, onanism, was used in Israel. The term originated from Onan who refused to carry out his duty for his dead brother by marrying his brother's wife (see [Gen. 38:7-10](#)). However, from [Ruth 2:20](#) and [3:12](#) we can see that the levirate law was a clan regulation rather than for the family in the narrow sense. Nevertheless, the purpose of the levirate system was 'to perpetuate the name of the dead' ([Ruth 4:5, 10](#)) and the child born of the marriage was considered the son of the deceased (see [Ruth 4:13-17](#)).

The name of a person is very important in Israelite society for it reveals the character or destiny of the person who bears it. Ample examples, for instance the names of Abraham, Jacob and Israel, etc., illustrate this truth. But this is not in the realm of our present discussion. But the patronymic name (the child was named after his father, grandfather, great grandfather, or uncle) may have something to do with ancestor worship, or at the least, with ancestor practices.

TREATMENT OF THE DEAD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

because, though both were David's children they were born of different mothers ([2 Sam. 13](#)), etc. (See de Vaux, *ibid.*, pp.19-20).

⁴ See James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp.172-173. Cf. also Hunt, *ibid.*, p.52.

⁵ The term Levirate comes from Latin, *levir*, which translating the Hebrew *Yabam* (brother-in-law or husband's brother). It means that at the death of a man without children, his brother must marry the widow so that her children will bear the name of the deceased and continue his line of descendants.

Another important matter related to family life is the treatment of the dead in the Old Testament. This subject has been covered very well by both de Vaux and Pfeiffer.⁶ First, we must realize that the Hebrew P. 220 word *nephesh* can be used for both a living 'soul' ([Gen. 2:7](#)) and a dead 'body' ([Num. 6:6](#); [19:13](#); [Lev. 21:11](#)). Hebrew thinking did not distinguish between the soul and body. Although Pfeiffer mentions that 'some scholars, adopting the theory of Herbert Spencer that the grave was the first shrine and the tombstone the first altar, believe that the ancient Semites worshipped the ghosts of their ancestor'.⁷ However, he maintains that 'our available information indicates clearly that the early Semites, like the Israelites later, believed in human survival after death and feared the ghosts of the deceased, but it does not prove that such ghosts were worshipped like divine beings'.⁸ For the Israelites, death was not annihilation. The dead were believed to survive weakly and miserably in the bleak darkness of the family grave or like a shade in the subterranean abode of Sheol ([Ez. 32:17-32](#); [Job 26:5-6](#); [Is. 14:9-10](#)). Sheol is often translated both as 'grave' and 'hell' in the Bible. But it was considered by the Israelites to be a land of darkness and gloom ([Job 10:21](#)), a place of silence ([Ps. 31:17](#)), and a land of forgetfulness ([Ps. 88:12](#)). Hence, in Sheol there is no activity, no planning, no knowledge, no wisdom ([Eccl. 9:10](#)) and the departed spirits cannot praise God in Sheol ([Ps. 6:5](#); [30:9](#); [88:10](#); [Is. 38:18](#)).

Since the deceased were considered still living, it was very important to have a proper treatment of the corpse and to have an honourable burial. To leave the dead body unburied or to let the corpse be a prey for birds and the wild beasts was thought of as the worst of all fates ([1 Kings 14:11](#); [Jer. 16:4](#); [22:19](#); [Ez. 29:5](#)). However, both the corpse and the grave were considered unclean and those who touched them were also considered unclean ([Lev. 21:1-4](#); [22:4](#); [Num. 10:11-16](#)).

The burning of a body was an outrage which was inflicted only on notorious criminals ([Gen. 38:24](#), [Lev. 20:14](#); [21:9](#)) or on enemies a man wanted to annihilate forever ([Amos 2:1](#)). Therefore, cremation was not practised in Israel. As a rule, burial took place on the day of death or as soon as possible.

The usual Israelite tomb was a burial chamber dug out of soft rock or a natural cave. A 'tomb of the sons of the people' in Kedron valley was for those who could not afford to own and maintain a tomb for the family ([2 Kings 23:6](#); [Jer. 26:23](#)). This was also where condemned criminals were thrown. A rich person could have a tomb for his own family. To be buried 'in the tomb of his father' was normal ([Jud. 8:32](#); [16:31](#); [2 Sam. 21:12-14](#)), but to be excluded from the family tomb was considered a punishment from God ([1 Kings 13:21-22](#)). p. 221

Sometimes some personal belongings and pottery were placed beside the corpse. Occasionally food was presented to the dead and incense was burned ([Deut. 26:14](#); [2 Chron. 16:14](#)). These acts, as explained by de Vaux, were based on a belief in survival after death and a feeling of affection towards the dead. 'They are not acts of worship directed towards the dead, for that attitude never existed in Israel'.⁹ He also mentions that prayer

⁶ See Roland de Vaux, *ibid.*, pp.56-61 and Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Religion in the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961) pp.17-21.

⁷ Pfeiffer, *ibid.*, p.17-18.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹ Roland de Vaux, *ibid.*, p.60.

and sacrifice of expiation for the dead (both incompatible with a cult of the dead) appear in the Apocrypha in [2 Maccabees 12:38–46](#).¹⁰

NO ANCESTOR WORSHIP IN ISRAEL

From the foregoing discussion we can deduce that there are indications of ancestor worship in the Old Testament times but there was no ancestor worship in Israel. Living in Palestine, surrounded by pagan nations, the Israelites might be influenced by these nations and at times in certain places might have followed their practices in this regard. However, as exegeted by Gerhard von Rod, the First Commandment 'was also directed against the less important private cults, in particular against any manner of worship of the dead'.¹¹ The person who turns to mediums and to spiritists ([Lev. 19:31](#); [20:6, 27](#); [Deut. 18:11](#)) and the mourners who shave their hair and beard partly and make cuts on their bodies ([Lev. 19:27–28](#); [21:5](#); [Deut. 14:1](#)) were all condemned because these practices were done by the heathen.

Questions might also be raised concerning funeral rites, stele over the tomb and the leaders of the tribes being treated like gods in Israel. Was this ancestor worship? For all the rites related to the treating of the dead, de Vaux maintains:

These ceremonies were regarded as a duty which had to be paid to the dead, as an act of piety which was their due ([1 Sam. 31:12](#); [2 Sam. 21:13–14](#); [Tb. 1:17–19](#); [Si. 7:33](#); [22:11–12](#)). For children, these rites formed part of that duty to their parents enjoined by the Decalogue. We conclude that the dead were honoured in a religious spirit, but that no cult was paid to them.¹²

In regard to the stele, it is true that Jacob set up a pillar over his beloved wife Rachel's tomb ([Gen. 35:20](#)) and Absalom set up a monument for [p. 222](#) himself in the King's Valley because he had no son to preserve his name ([2 Sam. 18:18](#)). However, Jacob's deed was a love memorial and Absalom's monument may be compared with the returning eunuch to the land of Israel after the Exile who sighed: 'Behold, I am a dry tree! ([Is. 56:3](#)) Then the Lord said:

To the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths, And choose to please Me, And hold fast My covenant, To them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, And a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off ([Is. 56:4–5](#)).

In Mowinckel's book, *Psalms in Israel's Worship*, the truth concerning tribal leaders in Israel is stated. The basic reality in human life for the Israelites is not the individual, nor the leader, but the community. Each tribe has a common ancestor who represents the tribe. This person is often looked upon as the deity of the tribe or in other cases he may bear the name of the tribe. However, Mowinckel's main concern in writing this is to prove that the 'I' and 'We' in the Royal Psalms are actually the same. The leader of Israel 'is the "representative" because the "soul", the history, the honour, the vigour and the blessing of the whole are concentrated on him. And, the other way round, all the others participate

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol.1 (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962), p.208. See also p.276 where he mentions the Jahwism turned with a special intolerance against all forms of the cult of the dead.

¹² Roland de Vaux, *ibid.*, p.61.

dynamically in what he represents'.¹³ Mowinckel is not asserting that the leaders of Israel were worshipped as gods.

If we understand what 'worship' meant in Israel then our conclusion that Israel did not practise ancestor worship is much more conclusive. G. E. Wright states that in the worship of the Israelites, 'the focus of attention is on the will and acts of God, especially as revealed in historical events'.¹⁴ Hence, the religious festivals were very important in the faith and life of Israel. Concerning the forms and the spirit of worship, H. H. Rowley maintains, 'The more discerning religious leaders of Israel were always aware that it was the spirit that gave meaning to the act and that the spirit was more important than the act'.¹⁵ He also deduces that early in Israel it was perceived that the spirit without the ritual act could suffice. However, 'where the ritual act was prescribed, sincerity of penitence could not dispense with it'.¹⁶ So he asserts that p. 223 no forms of worship constrain the spirit to worship and that without the spirit the forms are not real worship.¹⁷

In regard to the object of the worship in Israel, after surveying the nations around, Peter Ellis concludes:

Thus the God of the patriarchs, as he is revealed through the patriarchal traditions in Genesis, is personal, unrestricted, unassociated with other gods, all powerful, provident, and benevolent. The question, however, may be raised as to whether the patriarchs themselves realized the God they worshipped was indeed the 'only' God.¹⁸

Then he goes on to say that what the patriarchs thought about the gods worshipped throughout the ancient Near East is not clear. In the world of Abraham, polytheism was the common and universal belief. Monotheists were unknown. However, Ellis acknowledges that even if the patriarchs were not monotheists they were at least monolatrists.

These monolatrists, worshipped one God, focused their attention on the will and acts of God in historical events, emphasized the spirit rather than forms, and said that sincerity of penitence could not dispense with the ritual act. They also observed the strict and firm First Commandment that you shall have no other gods before me. Consequently, there is no place for the assertion that ancestor worship was practised in Israel.

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¹³ Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, vol.I (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p.43.

¹⁴ G. E. Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1968), p.101.

¹⁵ H. H. Rowley, *Worship in Ancient Israel: Its Forms and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p.246.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.249.

¹⁸ Peter Ellis, *The Yahwist: The Bible's First Theologian* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Fides Publisher Inc., 1968), p.101.

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Christianity Encounters Ancestor Worship in Taiwan

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This article is based on a term paper presented at the China Evangelical Seminary, Taipei. The author shows that ancestor worship among the Minnan Chinese of Taiwan has its roots in primitive animism (rather than in Confucianism). Using a theological analytical approach she suggests some functional substitutes for Christian Taiwanese.

(Editors)

The aim of this article is to develop a more adequate approach to Taiwanese ancestor worship. It rests upon the assumption that ancestor worship in Taiwan has never been effectively encountered by Christianity and hence continues in its current virile form as a major roadblock to the growth of the Church especially in rural villages.

ANCESTOR WORSHIP IN CURRENT TAIWANESE SOCIETY

Chu Ming-ching has remarked that 'Ancestor worship is still the most vital factor in Taiwanese folk religion: It continues to hold a position of much consequence in the religious and social life of the people'.¹

Whether theistic or atheistic in thought, we find that most Chinese families have ancestor tablets established in their homes for the convenience of worshipping their ancestors regularly. The rituals associated with it are *complex* and they involve ceremonies at death, burial, mourning, worshipping of the ancestral tablets at home, in the ancestral temple (hall) and at the tomb of the deceased.

Ancestor Worship in Private Home: In the Chinese mind, it is believed that ancestor spirits live in the 'other world' as much as they did while on earth. Hence they must be fed, cared for and propitiated. If these needs are not met the ancestors will be hungry and dissatisfied and in a sense, they will become malevolent spirits who roam around and cause trouble, disease and calamities upon the family as well as the neighbourhood. In order to avoid such dangers, the family of the deceased sets up a tablet on the table of the family altar which symbolizes the articulation of the spirit with the human world.

Ancestor Worship in Temples (Halls): Ancestral temples in Taiwan p.226 began to appear only during the later stages of the development of the cult—in the late Ching and Japanese occupation period. Chinese clan or lineage began to develop based either on a common surname or origin or a descendent-group propagated by a founding father who immigrated to the area in the early days.

Usually in a clan, the annual rites of ancestor worship and the communal feasts are held in their ancestor hall according to their background and economic situation. 'The activities of ancestor worship help to provide the necessary group solidarity, strengthen their internal unity and co-operation against pressures from the outside especially in times when the social situation is unabatable.'²

Ancestor Worship in Tombs: The worship at the tomb of the ancestors includes two aspects: sweeping the tombs of the ancestors and the management of the bones of the ancestors, usually called geomancy.

During the tomb-sweeping festival, people who follow the old Chinese customs worship their ancestors and the gods in the hope that their fields will bring a good harvest. All members of the family are expected to visit their forefathers' tombs which are swept and cleaned once a year. Then paper money is hung on the tomb remembering their ancestors. Sacrifices are offered when the first baby boy is born in the family or when a son is married during the year.

Geomancy (Wind and Water doctrine) indicates the climate and the law of nature that control atmospheric conditions which bear a strong influence over the fate of a person. The central concept is to teach men where and how they ought to bury their dead so that as far as possible, the dead, the gods and the living may be situated in the most suitable places to benefit from the auspicious influence of nature.

ANALYSIS OF CHINESE ANCESTOR WORSHIP

¹ Chiu M. C., 'Two Types of Folk Piety: A Comparative Study of Two Folk Religions of Formosa', PH.D. dissertation, University of Chicago (1970), p.226.

² K. T. Liao, 'A Study from a Theological Perspective of the Religious Element in Chinese Ancestor Worship as Practised in Contemporary Taiwanese Society', Taipei (1979). M.Th. dissertation, p.84.

The essence of ancestor worship in current Taiwanese society is *primitive animism* which centres on the worship of supernatural ghosts and ancestors. Because of the belief that ancestor spirits live in another world, a man must marry and bear a male heir to provide the needs of this spirit community. If the line of a male heir is broken, Minnan-Chinese have designed supplementary methods to prevent these spirits from becoming hungry ghosts: he may adopt a child from his brother or from another family which is usually in a poor economic situation, or bring a daughter's husband into the family by marriage. It **P. 227** is most important to set up a new family to continue the patrilineal line so that the ancestors will always have incense burned in their honour and offerings made to nurture them.

Most of the Minnan Chinese firmly believe that the soul of a person exists eternally in another world after death so that food offerings and incense burnings are a must to prevent a painful existence for the dead in the other world.

Theories as to the location of the departed are not uniform, but it is generally believed that the soul of a deceased person is to be found in three places at once, or perhaps more correctly, that each man has three souls: the soul that goes to the future world to be judged and is assigned either to a heaven or to a hell; the soul in the grave and also in the ancestral tablet.

Filial piety is the hallmark of Chinese society. In the homes of the eldest son and often of the other sons is a tablet to a deceased father, and on it as well, is the name of the mother (and perhaps the names of the sons). Before these tablets, incense may be burned daily and offerings of food placed on stated occasions. Important family events such as betrothals are announce to them, and at a marriage, the wedding couple make their kowtow before them. Prayer may be offered to them for help in emergencies and lots may be cast before them in making important decisions.

As mentioned, the Chinese believe that the soul exists in a spirit community after death. A man is thus supposed to marry to establish a family and to have children in order to meet the ancestor's needs for life after death. In fact, we find that the concept of the family as indispensable for the transmission of life as well as for the maintenance of life eternal is deeply rooted in the minds of the Chinese. Moreover, ceremonies in honour of ancestors have a decided utility in helping to tie together the family and the clan. Their maintenance depends upon a mixture of motives, although respect and affection to the deceased may be the predominant one.

Many other practices are associated with the concept of familiism. About New Year's time, the dead member of the family may be welcomed to the homes from the ancestral temples and tombs, and then a few days later, formally sent back to their customary abodes. At Ching Ming, the great spring festival, the graves are cleaned and repaired and offerings made of food, flowers and incense. Other occasions, such as the birthday of the deceased, might also be commemorated by a special ceremony and offering.

On the whole, we find that since one's own offspring are the most dependable persons to be entrusted with the duty of caring for the **p. 228** ancestor's needs, ancestor worship is rooted in the institution of the traditional Chinese family.

In view of what has been discussed, it can be readily seen that the ancestral cult has important social results. As Latourette put it, 'It forms a bulwark of that outstanding social and economic unit, the family; it makes for the conservation of much of the past; it is the means of moral and social control, and it acts as a check on individualism. As a factor in moulding Chinese thought and life, it can hardly be exaggerated'.³

³ K. S. Latourette, *The Chinese: Their History and Culture*, 4th ed., New York: Macmillan, 1962, p.540.

However, such a social structure has religious implications too, in view of the fact that the essence of ancestor worship is primitive animism. In speaking of the peculiar domain of animism in its most indigenous forms in Taiwanese religion, Gates identifies the animistic corpus as consisting of two realities combined: 'the souls of the individual creatures (ancestors) capable of continued existence after the death or destruction of the body ... and all other spirits, upward to the rank of powerful deities'.⁴ In other words, worship of ancestors involves the polytheistic dimension of Taiwanese folk religion.

A THEOLOGICAL-ANALYTICAL APPROACH

The Animistic-Polytheistic World of Ancestor Worship Encountered: Addison has pointed out that a missionary's approach to other religions will be determined by his understanding of their nature and origin: 'Who is responsible for the beliefs and practices of these alien peoples—God or Satan? How you will act when confronted with them will naturally depend on what answer you give'.⁵

However, the answer in the case of ancestor worship is relatively complex. Gates has attributed the nature and origin of ancestor worship to 'the Powers' which were overthrown in the death and resurrection of Christ, and will be finally defeated in the parousia.⁶

We find that even as Christ disarmed the principalities and powers through His resurrection, and forced them to participate in his victory procession, so Christians are called today to go forth in His name and power and do likewise, wherever these powers still hold men under their dominion ([2 Cor. 2:14–17](#)).

In the Old Testament we find a few references to Satan and the [p. 229](#) powers but no clear formulation as to how Yahweh would provide eternal salvation for His people. However, in the New Testament, one finds not only a fuller revelation of God in Christ, but also a more concrete unveiling of Satan and the powers. Narrative accounts of demonic activity are varied. Jesus encountered two demon-possessed men in a graveyard ([Matt. 8](#)); the disciples struggle unsuccessfully to deliver a demon-tormented boy ([Matt. 17](#)); the sons of Sceva are overcome by demonic powers ([Acts 19](#)); and the apostle Paul exorcises the python spirit from the Philippian slave girl ([Acts 16](#)). Moreover, the New Testament confronts the animistic aspect of ancestor worship with the fact that Christ, in rising from the dead, has disarmed the powers and triumphed over them ([Col. 2:15](#)). He has entered the strong man's house and dealt Satan the decisive blow. As a result, all who are indwelt by the Spirit of the mighty Christ are under the protection of God. No created power in heaven, earth, or under the earth is able, henceforth, to separate those who are 'in Christ' from the love of God ([Rom. 8:39](#); [Jn. 10:28](#)).

As the fear of spirits is replaced by the experience of liberation and blessing, the redeemed Taiwanese becomes aware of the dynamic possibilities of his new orientation to all of reality in Christ ([2 Cor. 5:17](#)). His new relationship with God means the possibility of entirely new approaches to his culture, especially in relation to honours to ancestors and the whole system of family and life associated with it.

We have much to learn from the apostle Paul in the area of spiritual warfare and the appropriation of power which is ours through Christ. In [Ephesians 6:11, 12](#) we read, 'Put

⁴ Alan F. Gates, *Christianity and Animism in Taiwan*, San Francisco: Chinese Materials Centre (1979), p.240.

⁵ J. T. Addison, 'The Changing Attitude Toward Non-Christian Religions', *International Review of Missions* (1938), No.27 p.110–21.

⁶ Gates, *op. cit.*, p.199f.

on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’.

Gates asserts that in the Apostle Paul’s teaching, when the powers are resisted in this way, several things happen: ‘(i) Their true nature is unmasked. They are seen for what they really are—self-vaunting intelligences desirous of being gods, not servants, and determined on a mission of deceiving men and keeping them in alienation from God ([Col. 2:20, 21](#); [Rom. 8:35](#)). (ii) The illusory nature of the powers is also brought to light. In exalting themselves and desiring to be like God, they have created the impression of greatness and unlimited power. When encountered and resisted in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, all their semblance of greatness fades away ... they cannot go beyond limits set by God ([Acts 4:28](#))’.⁷ p. 230

This brings us to one active dimension found in Paul’s instruction to the Church. The individual Christian as well as the collective body of believers have an offensive as well as a defensive strategy. The believer’s prerogative is to speak the word of faith. The ‘preaching of the cross’ is the ‘power of God’ unto salvation ([1 Cor. 1:18](#)). Thus when Christ is ‘lifted up’, the powers scatter, for the cross has disarmed them. As they have once been led in His victory procession, paraded as conquered beings by the Son of God who came back from the dead ([Rom. 1:4](#), [Col. 2:15](#)), so God’s children clad in the armour of God and indwelt by His spirit can by their testimony and His blood overcome them ([Rev. 12:11](#)).

We have just dealt with the animistic aspect of ancestor worship which is really its *essence* as a religious cult. We shall now go on to discuss the other minor issues which confront us, namely, the concept of eternal life, filial piety, familiism with its social implications, and attempt to give a theological perspective on these.

The Concept of Eternal Life Encountered:

In the Minnan Chinese concept of eternal life, it is believed that when a man dies, his soul goes to three places, and in order to prevent the dead from a painful existence, sacrifices and incense are offered. The question one must consider here is ‘Can Christians offer incense and sacrifices to their dead? Can such rites be accommodated?’ In keeping with what we have observed about the animistic polytheistic world of ancestor worship, we may use [1 Corinthians 10:21](#) for a reference. Here Paul says, ‘You cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord, and the table of demons’. Paul relates idols and demons by teaching that sacrificial offerings made to idols are made ‘to demons and not to God’. He is speaking here about the ordinance of Holy Communion. The argument is that if one would participate at the Lord’s table, he cannot offer sacrifices to idols. Sacrifice means communion and determines the communion (*koinonia*) to which one belongs. Hence it is obvious that Christians are not to accommodate the rites of sacrifices and incense to one’s dead.

To the question, whether it is possible, as the Minnan Chinese believe, that one can have communion with the living spirit of the departed, we find that the theological consideration is a little more difficult. In [Ecclesiastes 9:4–10](#), we read that ‘the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten. Indeed their love, their hate, and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun ... There is no activity or planning or wisdom in Sheol where you are going’. The answer here seems clear that the dead do not know it even if the living strives on earth to ease his painful existence in another world,

⁷ Ibid., p.229.

or ask his opinion regarding important matters, and further more they cannot provide any prosperity coveted by the worshipper.

Conversely, it is difficult to conceive of the ancestor cult as having survived these thousands of years if it did not involve the reality of some form of spirit communion between the living and what is regarded as the spirits of the dead. The account of Saul and the witch of Endor ([1 Sam. 28:8–10](#)) provides a clue, though one is reluctant to be dogmatic. On the surface, it would seem that Saul truly conversed with the spirit of Samuel. But one hastens to point out two things: first, the possibility of a counterfeit. Saul did not see Samuel. The woman saw someone but called him a 'god' ([28:13](#)). Was this really Samuel? Second, this was not a form of ancestor worship. There was no kinship relation between Saul and Samuel, nor was Saul's purpose in coming that of worship. This is a poor model upon which to establish the possibility of actual communion with the spirit of one's ancestor.

Although this incident has little similarity to ancestor worship as such, it does present a form of behaviour which is frequently associated with ancestor worship in Taiwan, namely calling upon the dead for information relating to an unsolved problem. The reply received usually relates the problem to the neglect of the ancestor by the living descendants.

The appearance of Elijah and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration is related to the power of God and offers even less evidence to substantiate real communion between living and dead kin. What Beyerhaus has asserted seems rather compelling:

It is the unanimous consensus of Rabbinism, the New Testament and the Church Fathers that the spiritual forces behind mediumistic and occult phenomena are not the souls of the departed but the power of the fallen angels or demons who are masters of disguise.⁸

We conclude that in Taiwanese ancestor worship involving worship, prayer and sacrifice, some form of spirit contact takes place, but the spirits involved are other than those of the departed.

In view of this conclusion, we would do well to teach the Christian concept of eternal life. [John 5:24](#) posits faith in Christ as the inseparable p. 232 concomitant of life so that 'He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life' ([1 Jn. 5:12](#)). The emphasis here falls on the interconnection of faith and life, so that eternal life for the Christian begins the moment one believes and accepts Christ as Lord and Saviour, and that although spiritual life is imparted to men in this life, physical death still comes. But the Bible has adequate assurance for the believer: 'to die is to gain' ([Phil. 1:21](#)), and there is the calm assurance that 'the Lord will rescue me from every evil and save me for his heavenly kingdom' ([1 Tim. 4:18](#)). A new Taiwanese convert with ancestor worship background needs to realize that it is the Lord Himself who will ensure real 'peace and Prosperity' (irregardless of circumstances) in this life, and not the spirits of his dead ancestors.

The Concept of Filial Piety Evaluated:

The tenet of filial piety has always held a most important place in Chinese ethics and also in the Chinese cultural tradition as a whole. This ethical teaching of filial piety encourages offspring to show their love to their ancestors by placing the ancestral tablet in the eldest son's home and perhaps of the other sons as well.

We find that the Bible does tell the Christian to respect his parents (cf. [Ex. 20:12](#); [21:17](#); [Dt. 5:16](#); [Prov. 30:11](#), [17](#); [Eph. 6:2](#)).

⁸ Peter Beyerhaus, 'The Christian Approach to Ancestor Worship', *Ministry*, Vol.6, No.4 (1966) p.137–145.

We find that the Biblical teaching of filial piety set against the ethical teaching of Chinese filial piety, gives one the conviction that only the born-again believer who has appropriated the power of the Holy Spirit will be enabled to show true love and honour to his parents. Again we find that rather than teaching God's laws for meaningful living on earth, Minnan Chinese parents teach their children to worship them when they pass into the other world. It is not amazing to find that in Taiwan, this is one of the main reasons why parents adamantly forbid their children to become Christians.

The Concept of Family Evaluated:

As mentioned earlier, this concept of the Minnan Chinese rests on the transmission of life from generation to generation, with a decided utility to tie the family and clan together, and a check on individualism. While one may not agree to the kind of superstition that is being practised especially in relation to the 'adoption of sons' to carry on the family tree, a believer may still want to follow the custom of remembering their dead on New Year's Day and All Soul's Day (Ching-Ming). This is to be thought of strictly in the sense of *remembering* rather than worshipping or even in terms of inviting them from the tomb to the [p. 233](#) home to celebrate the New Year festivities with us (as an obligation to ease their painful existence in the other world).

While we find that in the Western world, the family gathers together for Christmas, here in the East and especially in Taiwan, the family members make it a point to get together for Chinese New Year. It does not seem necessary that the custom of meeting together for New Years should be changed to Christmas the moment the family become Christians. After all, the Bible does not in any way indicate that such an accommodation should not be made. We should also allow for a visit to the grave of the ancestor during the period of the family reunion, and in keeping with this, the cleaning and repair of the tomb as well as decoration of fresh flowers. We may even add the additional element of praying to God at the tomb-site for the rest of the family members who are alive, especially for a fresh awareness of the meaning of life and the wisdom of living it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We may bring in the point here that familiism may be thought of in terms of 'God's forever family' for a wider perspective. As the household of God, the emphasis is on the fact that Christians have been born into God's family, and therefore stand in a special relationship to Him as well as to one another. [Gal. 6:10](#) admonishes: 'So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith'. Here Paul refers first of all, to the doing of good to all men, that is, those within God's family and those that are outside. More than that, we find members of God's family are given the primary task of evangelism by the risen Christ ([Mark 16:15](#); [Luke 24:45-47](#); [Acts 1:8](#)). The whole Church is called upon to share in the God-given task of preaching the Gospel to all men everywhere.

FUNCTIONAL SUBSTITUTES FOR TAIWANESE CONVERTS

Ancestor worship was thought of by missionaries in the Christian Mission only in negative terms, and they did not grapple seriously with the cultural and spiritual void which must be filled should any considerable segment of the population turn to Christ.

It would seem appropriate at this point to bring up some proposals toward adequate functional substitutes for new Taiwanese converts who have a background in ancestor worship.

In Private Homes: Often the experience of Chinese families who were ancestral worshippers is to have a certain sense of insecurity and fear of the unknown when their ancestral tablets are removed from the altar of their living room, when they decide to become Christians. [p. 234](#) Rather than leaving it empty, a tablet of approximately the same size may be put in place of it. This latter tablet has a design with the symbol of the Cross in the middle, probably a picture of Jesus' praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, and Bible verses filling the sides of the tablets, such as [Acts 16:31](#), 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, you and your household'; or [Joshua 24:15](#), 'But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord'. In the place where originally names of ancestors were inscribed, the words, 'Honour your father and mother, that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth' ([Ex. 20:12](#); [Deut. 5:16](#); [Eph. 6:2, 3](#)) may be inscribed.

In addition, family prayer meetings may be held once a week under the guidance of the pastor at first, with the leadership being shifted to the head of the house (father or grandfather) as soon as he is capable of being independent in his faith in God and has sufficient knowledge of the Bible and its application. While the new tablet may be thought of as a means to help the family affirm their faith during the interim period of their new found faith in Christ, family prayer meetings may be thought of as a regular event.

Christian Memorial in Place of the Ancestral Temple: This proposal implies the need for the construction of a Christian Memorial designed according to Chinese architecture in order to serve the need when large segments of the rural village are won to Christ. The Memorial may be used to conduct memorial services at the time of death, during All Soul's Day Chinese New Year and other occasions, such as birthdays when the folk people remember their dead. Solomon said that 'The memory of the righteous is a blessing' ([Prov. 10:7](#)).

Ancestral temples tend to be symbolic of the Taiwanese sense of historic ethnic identity as well as religious identity. A Christian Memorial could very well help these former animistic folks to realize that they now have a new religious identity in Christ even as they have been 'transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light' ([Col. 1:13-14](#)).

In speaking about the function of animistic folk religion in Taiwan, Gates observes that 'What lends cohesive quality to the Taiwanese as a people is the deep religious feelings which are visualized and experienced in the ceremony ...'.⁹ When memorial services are conducted in the proper manner and exhortation is given in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit will certainly bring about a deeper quality of cohesiveness among His people. Not only exhortations such as 'The eternal [p. 235](#) state of the dead, and the resurrection of believers' may be given, but testimonies relating to faith and trust in God, as well as experiences of God's comfort and guidance for the future may be given to stimulate identification as a people who have experienced new life in Christ.

Visitation of the Tombs: We have found that apart from ancestral worship in the temples and private home, such a practice also occurs at the tombs. The question as to how Christians are to accommodate to such practices has already been dealt with. While we will not compromise with worshipping the deceased and the offering of sacrifices and prayers to them, the other non-animistic aspects may be incorporated into the Christian practice.

CONCLUSION

⁹ Gates, *op. cit.*, p.145.

In review, we find that ancestor worship, especially in relation to its animistic-polytheistic world, is too massive and powerful an entrenchment to be taken by any blind 'general assault'. In our discussion of the social and religious implications of ancestor worship, we find that ancestor worship as an animistic folk religion more or less functions as the centre of life and the common factor which integrates the variegated aspects of peasant life into a coherent whole.

Gates has given us the important insight that little significant encounter has taken place between the Lordship of Christ and the 'powers' of the air, with respect to past dealings in this area. But while he develops his thoughts a great deal in relation to the encounter, he does not tell us how to deal with the situation of contextualization in the event that great numbers of rural folks respond to his kerygmatic approach.

The theological-analytical approach to ancestor worship developed in this article serves only as a guideline for further thought and action, as do the proposals for an adequate functional substitute to fill the spiritual and cultural void that is experienced by those who make their commitment to Christ.

ADDITIONAL ARTICLES ON ANCESTOR WORSHIP

Hung, Daniel M. (1983) 'Mission Blockade: Ancestor Worship', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 19:1:32-40.

Hwang, Bernard (1977) 'Ancestor Cult Today', *Missiology* 5:3:339-365.

Tung, Feng-yuen (1977) 'An Assessment of the Catholic "Ancestor Worship" Movement in Taiwan' *Ching Feng* 50:16-26.

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Ancestor Worship in the Korean Church

Myung Hyuk Kim

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This article was presented as a paper at the Consultation on A Christian Response to Ancestor Practices, December 26-31, 1983, Taipei, Taiwan. The author outlines the history of Korean Churches' response to ancestor worship and he discusses the future possibilities in the light of the growing secularization of Korean society.

(Editors)

CONFUCIAN CULTURE

As H. Richard Niebuhr has well pointed out, the relationship between Christ and culture has been 'an enduring problem' throughout the history of Christian expansion.¹ When Christianity was introduced in the land of Korea about 200 years ago, the initial problem was the conflict between the Christian, God-centred way of life and the Confucian, man-centred way of socio-politico-ethical life.

The Korean culture at the last quarter of the 18th century, when the Roman Catholic Christianity was first introduced, was thoroughly saturated in Confucianism centred around the life principle of patriotic loyalty and filial piety. Confucianism was a national 'religion' or policy of the Yi dynasty and it was a basic ethical principle as well as a pragmatic socio-political policy. Filial piety was regarded as a most basic and integral ethical principle of Confucianism to follow the Mandate of Heaven and to reach the union of the Heaven and man, the ideal state of man. It was also intended to bring unity and harmony within the large family system and socio-political settlement in a nation.

Filial piety was practised through propriety and rite both to the living and the deceased ancestors.² Propriety occupied such an important position in the Confucian culture that Confucianism was often called a culture of propriety system. Beside the basic ethical motive to express and return filial gratitude to ancestors and to follow the Mandate of the Heaven, there was also a religious element attached to the ancestor honouring rite. Even though Confucius did not teach immortality of soul or after-death, the Confucian tradition taught that when a man dies his soul goes up to heaven and his form goes down to earth and [p. 237](#) that they are united at the ancestor worship ceremony.³ Yi Yulgok, a saintly Confucian scholar (1536–1583) once stressed the necessity of ancestor worship on the basis of such a religious belief.

When a man dies, his soul might be said either existing or non-existing. It is because that a soul exists with sincere devotion and a soul dissolves without devotion ... When a man's soul is separate after death and has not yet dissolved, it could be moved and elevated and united through my sincere devotion ... Even after a man's soul has dissolved, his reason does not dissolve, and his reason could be moved and elevated ... This is why descendants remember their ancestors and perform ceremonies in a utmost devoted manner.⁴

The ancestor worship ceremony was gradually accompanied even with another religious idea of reward and blessing. It was believed that the faithful practice of filial piety and faithful performance of ancestor worship ceremony would please the Heaven and receive heavenly blessings. Then it was again commonly believed that the deceased souls themselves, not the Heaven, could be able to bless their descendants. The deceased souls took a position of a deity and became the object of worship.⁵

CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY

¹ See H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951), pp.1ff.

² Confucius once said that 'Honour through propriety when living, bury through funeral rites when dead, and perform ceremony through rites'.

³ See Choi Ki Bock, *A Study on the Confucian Ceremony of Mourning* (Sung Kyun Kwan Univ., 1979), pp.128f.

⁴ Quoted by Choi Ki Bock, *ibid.*, pp.129f.

⁵ See Park Bong Bae, 'Christianity and Ancestor Worship' (Korean) in Harold Hong et al. ed., *Church and Mission in Korea* (C.L.S.K., 1963), pp.201ff.

Catholic Christianity in Korea was not propagated by foreign missionaries. It was introduced by Korean scholars through their contact with Christian literature obtained in Peking. Matteo Ricci, a Jesuit apostle to China, took up his residence in Peking in 1601 and propagated Jesuit Christianity by means of introducing western science and publishing Christian literature. He published his *True Doctrine of the Lord of Heaven* in 1601 and in his work Matteo Ricci did not take a negative attitude toward Confucianism and its culture. Rather he took it a preparation to Christianity. His mission policy was that of accommodation and through learning.⁶

It was then customary for the king of Korea to send an annual envoy to Peking to present compliments and gifts to the emperor of China. Some of these members came into contact with Matteo Ricci and his p. 238 successors. In 1631 Chong To Won, a member of the annual embassy, took back with him many books including Ricci's *True Doctrine*. The books thus imported to the Korean capital, however, received very little attention.⁷

It was almost at the end of the 18th century when Catholic Christianity began to be rooted in the land of Korea. In 1777 a few celebrated scholars, such as Chong Yak Chon and Kwon Chyol Sin, became interested in the new doctrines, began to expound them, and commenced practising the precepts of the Christian books. And in the winter of 1783 one of the members, a young man by the name of Yi Sung Hun, went to Peking with the annual embassy. While he was in the imperial capital he was converted and baptized. He was given the name of Peter, for it was hoped that he would be the first stone of the Korean Church. Peter Yi returned to Korea in the spring of 1784, and baptized his friend Yi Tok Cho.⁸ The year of 1784 is generally regarded as the beginning year of Roman Catholic Church in Korea.⁹

The Catholic teaching which was transmitted to Korea in 1784 was not the same as Ricci's. Matteo Ricci and his Jesuit mission took an accommodation policy and regarded ancestor worship merely as civil ceremony. Both the Franciscan and the Dominican mission, however, regarded the Confucian ancestor worship as religious and superstitious. The two missions sent their petition to Rome. Pope Benedictus XIV made it clear in 1742 that the Confucian ceremony of ancestor worship was not permissible in the Catholic Church. The Chinese Church followed the new instruction and met great difficulties and even persecution in 1784.¹⁰

The infant Korean Church met difficulties from the very beginning, for she took a critical attitude towards Confucianism and especially its ancestor worship ceremony. Thomas Kim Pum Wu was the first victim who was persecuted on the charge of burning his ancestral tablets. In 1790 the infant Korean Church sent one of their members to Peking and requested Bishop Alexandre de Govea to send a priest to Korea and also consulted about the critical matter of ancestor worship. The messenger returned with the assurance and promise of the bishop that an ordained man would be forthcoming. The messenger was also instructed to make it known that the worship of ancestors was inconsistent with the doctrine of the Church. In accordance to Govea's p. 239 prohibition

⁶ See Choi Suck Woo, 'Modern Korean Society and Roman Catholic Christianity' (Korean) in *Soong Chun Journal* 5 (1974), p.422.

⁷ L. George Paik, *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea 1832-1910* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1929 (1970)), pp.31f.

⁸ Ibid., p.32.

⁹ See Choi Suck Woo, *ibid.*, p.426.

¹⁰ See Choi Suck Woo, *ibid.*, p.428.

of ancestral worship zealous Christian converts tore down their ancestral tablets and set them on fire. The consequence was the inauguration of systematic persecution.¹¹

CONFLICT AND PERSECUTION

There was a man of noble class by the name of Yun Chi Chyong in a town (Jin San) of a southern Province (Chulado). He was converted in 1786 when he was 28. In the summer of 1791 his mother died and during the funeral period he refused to make ancestral tablets or to offer sacrifices to ancestors. This act brought a great commotion among his relatives and severe criticisms by them. Petitions were sent to the king. Yun Chi Chyong was finally brought to trial in a provincial court in October. He was tortured and reported to have said as the following: 'Since I accepted the Heavenly Lord to be my great parent it would not be right and honouring not to follow the order of the Heavenly Lord. Since the religion of the Heavenly Lord prohibits making a wooden tablet I buried it under the ground. I would rather do wrong to my deceased mother than to the Heavenly Lord'.¹² An investigator of Yun's pointed out Yun's pertinacity to follow Catholic teaching at the cost of disobeying the order of the king or the parent as the following: 'In every word he honours the teaching of the Heavenly Lord. It might be right for him to disobey the order of the king or the parent. It would be however never right to disobey the teaching of the Heavenly Lord under the severest punishment. He would take it an honour to be beheaded'.¹³ On receiving a report of Yun's trial and many critical petitions, the king was finally persuaded to give a sentence of execution. In December 1791 Yun Chi Chyong and Kwun Syang Yen, his nephew, who also refused to offer sacrifices were beheaded. The event of persecution is called as the Shin Hae persecution, for it happened in the Shin Hae year of 1791.

Even a Chinese priest James Chu Moon Mo who was sent from Peking to Korea in 1794 was beheaded in 1801 on a charge of both religious heresy of denying filial piety and abolishing sacrifice to ancestors and political conspiracy against the nation. Under such a tense situation a certain Korean Catholic by the name of Whang Sa Young wrote a letter to the bishop of Peking in which he proposed an appeal to the Christian nations in Europe to send sixty or seventy thousand soldiers to conquer Korea. This document was discovered by a government p. 240 agent. It resulted in strict enforcement of the anti-Christian edicts and an intensification of the persecution.¹⁴ Now Catholic Christianity was regarded as a perverse religion against filial piety and patriotic loyalty. It was even suspected as revolutionary against the nation. The Korean Catholic Church met persecutions at the hands of the government in the years 1801, 1815, 1819, 1827, 1839, and finally in 1866.

A NEW APPROACH

The burning issue of ancestor worship in China was dealt with by Rome from a new perspective. On December 18th of 1939 the newly elected pope Plus XII issued an encyclical on the Chinese custom of ancestor worship in which he declared that in a

¹¹ See L. George Paik, *ibid.*, pp.32f.

¹² Quoted by Choi Suck Woo, *ibid.*, p.429.

¹³ *Idem.*

¹⁴ See L. George Paik, *ibid.*, pp.34f.

modern age in which the spirit of traditional customs has greatly changed the Confucian ancestor worship should be regarded merely as a civil rite to express filial affection to ancestors.¹⁵ In 1940 the Korean Catholic Church took a rather tolerant attitude towards traditional ancestral worship and allowed such behaviour as bowing in front of a corpse, a tomb, or a picture of the deceased, burning incense in front of a corpse or at the ancestral worship, and preparing and offering foods in memory of the deceased.¹⁶

The Second Vatican Council (1962–65) reaffirmed the tolerant attitude towards other religious traditions. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (section 37) reads as the following: ‘Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community. Rather she respects and fosters the spiritual adornments and gifts of the various races and peoples. Anything in their way of life that is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy and, if possible, preserves intact. Sometimes in fact she admits such things into the liturgy itself, as long as they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit’.¹⁷ The traditional Roman Catholic teaching on purgatory in a way justified the Confucian ancestral worship, since p. 241 the Catholic Church has taught to pray for the dead.¹⁸ Now the Korean Catholic Church allows bowing, burning incense in front of a corpse or a picture, and offering prayers for the dead during the funeral service and on the 3rd, 7th, and 30th day from death. The Catholic Church even set a day of November 2 as a day of memorial and visiting ancestral graves.¹⁹

PROTESTANT CHRISTIANITY

Just like the Catholic Christianity, Protestant Christianity in Korea was not started by foreign missionaries. It was introduced and planted by Korean merchants through their contact with Protestant missionaries residing in Manchuria. In 1878 the So brothers, Sang Yun and San U (also known as Kyong Jo), went to Manchuria to peddle merchandise and came to contact with John Ross and John MacIntyre, Scottish Presbyterian missionary. They were converted and the elder brother San Yun was baptized by John Ross in 1879. So Sang Yun went to Mukden with Ross to assist in the Bible translation and printing, while the younger brother returned home. Sang Yun came back to Korea as a colporteur and smuggled the translated portion of the New Testament to his home village in Uiju and settled in Sorae in Hwanghae Province in 1883 a hundred years ago. Thus So Sang Yun became instrumental in the conversion of his neighbours and scattered the seed of the Gospel in the northwest of Korea. There was already a handful of Protestant Christians when the American missionaries entered the country in 1884 and in 1885.²⁰

¹⁵ See Choo Jae Young, *Confucian Concept of the Heavenly Lord and Ancestor Worship* (Korean) (Seoul: Kyung Hyang, 1958), p.3.

¹⁶ See Kang Youn Hee, ‘The Problem of Ancestor Worship in Christianity in Modern Korean Society’ (Korean), *Sa Mock* 37 (1975, 1), pp.100f.

¹⁷ Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1966), p.151.

¹⁸ See Sebastian Bullough, *Roman Catholicism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, (1963), p.141: ‘The notion of purgatory and the notion of prayer for the dead go hand in hand: the ‘communion of saints’ unites the living with the dead in prayer’.

¹⁹ See Choo Jae Young, *ibid.*, p.202.

²⁰ See L. George Paik, *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea*, pp.51–54.

Now the infant Korean Protestant Church faced the same puzzling problem about the ancestor worship as the Catholic Church faced a hundred years before. There was a first Korean convert who was secretly baptized and whose conversion was not made known even to his family. Yet his neglect of his religious duties soon placed him under public suspicion. It was a critical time, for the first Protestant missionaries in Korea had to decide the very important question of their policy toward the custom of ancestral worship. Should it be conformity and compromise, or rejection? The missionaries at once adopted the latter course. Ancestor worship was now clearly declared to be contrary to the Christian teaching.²¹ One of the very interesting p. 242 methods used in settling the question and reaching the definite conclusion was that of the questionnaire in a democratic procedure. A missionary sent out papers to the Christians and asked them to write down their views of the practice. The unanimous opinion was that ancestor worship was contrary to the New Testament teachings and that offering sacrifice was foolish. One of them said: 'For me, of course, I must remember my parents, but offering sacrifice to them is, I know, foolishness'.²²

There were rules made in the Korean Church for the catechumens to take and profess to obey at baptism. The first of the seven rules used during the period of 1891–97 read as the following: 'Since the most High God hates the glorifying and worshipping of spirits, follow not the custom of the honouring of ancestral spirits, but worship and obey God alone'.²³

SHRINE WORSHIP

During the last decade of the Japanese 36 year occupation of Korea (1910–45), the Korean Protestant Church faced a more difficult problem of shrine worship. Japanese government began to impose shrine worship upon every school and church in Korea from around 1932. While the Japanese people understood shrine worship as a religious ceremony of worshipping ancestral gods and the emperor god, Japanese government officials in Korea tried to persuade the Korean people to take it as a civil and national ceremony and forced them to participate in the shrine worship ceremony.²⁴ Missionaries as well as Korean Church leaders expressed opposition against the Japanese imposition of shrine worship and met great difficulties. On December 30, 1935 a Japanese official in charge of education summoned a number of school principals (missionaries) and admonished them in the following words: 'Shrine is a place where the spirits of our national father and veteran statesmen are dedicated and a public institute toward which we express our respect and reverence ... From an educational viewpoint it is necessary to worship such consecrated spirits, for it is an essence of national morality ... Therefore shrine worship is nothing more than a practical discipline of respect and reverence to ancestors'.²⁵ P. 243

Instead of complying with the Japanese enforcement of shrine worship, school principals (especially of the Presbyterian missions) decided to leave schools or close them. By February of 1938, 18 schools under both the northern and southern

²¹ See L. George Paik, *ibid.*, pp.157f.

²² See L. George Paik, *ibid.*, pp.220f.

²³ See L. George Paik, *ibid.*, pp.225f.

²⁴ See Kim Yang Sun, *History of the Korean Church: Study of the Maesan Christian Culture* (Korean) (Seoul: Christian Literature Co., 1971), pp.172–176.

²⁵ See Kim Yang Sun, *ibid.*, p.180.

Presbyterian mission were closed. Japanese government became more adamant enforcing the shrine worship upon the Korean Church. In September of 1938 Japanese police officials threatened the Presbyterian General Assembly that they must adopt the shrine worship as a patriotic national ceremony. Under a war-like police threat Hong Taek Ki, the chairman of the assembly, was trembling to illegally announce the adoption. The adopted motion was recorded as the following: 'We understand shrine worship is not a religion and is not contradictory to the Christian doctrine. Realizing that it is a patriotic national ceremony, we have decided to take the lead in participating in shrine worship'.²⁶ In spite of such an imposed resolution, the Korean Church (especially Presbyterian) stood resolutely opposed to the Japanese enforcement of shrine worship and went through many sufferings.

RECENT TRENDS

The Korean Presbyterian Church in general went through many sufferings and faced much persecutions because of her strong opposition both to the Confucian ancestor worship and Japanese shrine worship. Many were imprisoned and even met martyrdom.

Some of the new converts even today face the persistent problem of ancestor worship, for the Confucian tradition dies hard even in a modernized age. Local pastors have to take counsels with some of the new converts on this annoying problem of ancestor worship.

The Rev. Yonggi Cho, pastor of the famed mammoth Full Gospel Central Church in Seoul, gave rather tolerant advice to a certain new convert with a strong Confucian background and troubled with the problem of ancestor worship in 1977. In a public sermon delivered on November 30, 1979, the Rev. Cho amplified his remarks on the same subject giving an illustration of his counsel given to the new convert as following:

Ancestor worship is nothing but honouring one's parents. I do not understand why people say it is an idol worship ... Parents are parents whether they are alive or dead. Isn't it our custom to visit our living parents and prepare food for them?... It is quite natural that we think of our deceased parents on such day as of their birth or death. It is quite all right to prepare food thinking of our deceased parents as if they were present, erect a cross instead of an ancestral tablet, and bow down ...

We honour our parents with bowing down. It is not a sin to bow down to deceased parents. It is not an idol ... Our deceased parents have gone either to heaven or hell. Even though they have gone to hell, they are our parents. Having an affectionate remembrance of them is keeping God's commandment ... The Apostle Paul was a great man. To the Jews he became like a Jew to win Jews. To those under the law he became as one under the law that he might win those under the law. To those outside the law he became as one outside the law that he might win those outside the law ...

To perform an ancestral worship is really a good thing. In the past we performed sacrificial rites to God.

This sermon gave rise to a hot discussion and met with nationwide criticism. The *Christian Weekly Press* (Nov. 7, 1981) printed critical remarks often Christian leaders as the following: 'We express our filial courtesy to our living parents. Deceased ones are not persons. Preparing food and bowing is contradictory to the Commandment' (Prof. Chung Sung Koo). 'What Christianity takes important is person. We believe in God as a person. Deceased parents are not persons ... Bowing to impersonal beings is nonsense' (Rev. Chung Chin Kyung). 'In [1 Corinthians 10:20](#) Paul said, 'What pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. Sacrificial rules

²⁶ See Kim Yang Sun, *ibid.*, p.189.

are prescribed in the Scriptures. Ancestor worship is an idol worship' (Prof. Lee Jong Yun). 'There have been two kinds of mission policy in Asia, accommodation and transformation. Whereas ancestor worship was tolerated in such countries as India, China and Japan, it was not tolerated in Korea. The first mission policy in Korea was transforming old customs. It rejected wine, tobacco, opium, divination, and ancestor worship. Though ancestor worship is a traditional cultural rite it includes idolatrous elements and cannot be tolerated' (Prof. Kim Myung Hyuk). 'Preparing food and bowing to the deceased parents even without making an ancestral tablet is an obvious idolatry. Jesus himself abolished the Jewish sacrificial system and instituted worship with prayers ... Numerous men of faith have suffered because of this problem of ancestor worship. It would be a disgrace to them if we said that bowing without tablet is not an idolatry' (Prof. Chun Kyung Youn of Hankook Theological Seminary). 'If there is a pastor who says that it is all right to prepare a sacrificial table and bow, he must be lacking in theological foundation' (Rev. Choi Hae II). 'Preparing food and bowing is contradictory to theology and Bible' (Rev. Choi Hoon). p. 245

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Tradition dies hard. There is even a revival and resurgence of tradition in the third world. Affirmative voices toward tradition and cultural heritage are widely heard both in the theological and political worlds. The Vancouver assembly tried to affirm the Canadian Indian religious traditional spirituality as consonant to Biblical spirituality. Prof. Pyun Sun Whan, a noted Korean liberal theologian and a champion of dialogue with other religions, has recently expressed his affirmative view about ancestor worship in *The Dong-A Ilbo* (December 24, 1983), a widely circulated daily newspaper, as the following: 'Ancestor worship is a social product of a large family system. To express filial piety and perform sacrifices is following the Heaven designated ethics. Ancestor worship is an expression of filial affection, not an idolatry'. Mr. Jin Hee Lee, minister of Cultural Affairs and Information and spokesman of the Korean government, has also exhorted Christian leaders to take a rather affirmative attitude toward Korean culture and proposed a task of 'Koreanization of Christianity' in a public speech to a gathering of Christian leaders on December 16, 1983.

It is time that we evangelicals should be alerted to fully understand the relation between the Christian Gospel and secular culture and to provide clear-cut solutions in concrete situations. We may be doing well if we realize the criticizing, transforming and recreating power and function of the Gospel in various cultures as it has been seen throughout the history of Christianity.

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Church Unity Amidst Cultural Diversity A Protestant Problem

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The subject of this paper, as formulated, reveals a specifically 'Protestant' problem. In the Roman Catholic Church cultural and ethnic diversity has never really threatened the unity of the Church. The pope as the visible symbol of the unity of the Church, together with the universal use of Latin as the language of the Mass, helped enormously to safeguard global ecclesiastical unity.

In recent years, however, all this has come under increasing pressure. Latin has ceased to be the universal language of the Mass, and Roman Catholic theologians have more and more been emphasizing the need for the inculturation of the faith in each local situation.¹ Tension is beginning to develop between what Rome calls 'local churches' (dioceses or church provinces) and the 'universal church'. Whereas some seem to argue that a wane of romanity may spell the decay of catholicity, others plead eloquently for the autonomy and cultural distinctiveness of 'local' churches.

Whereas the tension between ecclesiastical unity and ethnic diversity is therefore a late comer on the Roman Catholic scene, it has always been at least latently present in Protestantism. Let me mention only *two* reasons for this:

1. At least the *German* Reformation was in some sense also a *people's movement*. Sociologically speaking (I am, for the sake of this argument, putting aside the theological reasons), the success of Luther's reformation can be partly attributed to the fact that for many people it was a symbol of Germanic resistance to Latin domination. The word 'Deutsch' gradually acquired a significance of meaning it had never had before. This anchoring of the Church in the people undoubtedly had merit, yet—as I hope to argue later on—at the same time it contained the seeds of potential danger.

2. Another reason for the higher rating of ethnic distinctiveness in Protestant churches is to be found in the fact that the churches of the Reformation were and still are pre-eminently churches of the *word*. This is already evident in the fact that the pulpit, and not the altar, [p. 247](#) dominates the liturgical centre. In what we may call the 'liturgical' churches, such as the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Anglican communities, the liturgy, rather than the proclaimed word, receives the main emphasis. And liturgy can communicate without its relying exclusively on the intelligibility of the spoken word. Not so, however, where preaching predominates. It has to be *understood*, which means that it has to be preached in a language in which the worshipper is thoroughly at home.

The problem remained latent, however, for at least two centuries after the Reformation. The reason for this was simple: The churches of the Reformation did not get seriously involved in mission work among peoples outside of Europe until the 18th century. In Europe itself, admittedly, the Reformation message was carried from country to country. It is important to point out, however, that no truly transnational denomination developed in those days. What happened, in essence, was that 'national' churches developed, a different church for each country. It is true, of course, that the famous Synod of Dort (1618/19) invited Reformed delegates from Britain, Switzerland and Germany to deliberate with them, but in essence it was a meeting of the *Dutch* church. As a matter of fact, a much earlier synod at Dort (1578) had already discussed the problem of church

¹ To give only one example: The 1981 Summer Course of the (Roman Catholic) East Asian Pastoral Institute was devoted, in its entirety, to 'Inculturation: Challenge to the Local Church' (see *East Asian Pastoral Review* 18:3, 1981, pp.203–99).

unity and cultural diversity and had decided on separate synods and circuits for Dutch- and French-speaking Christians.²

A few small-scale overseas missionary endeavours were indeed launched during the 17th century, mainly by the Dutch and the English. The real history of Protestant missions outside Europe, however, only began in the 18th century, under the auspices of the Halle Pietists and Zinzendorf's Moravians. Their emphasis throughout was on the salvation of *individuals*, or, as Zinzendorf liked to put it, on 'Seelen für das Lamm' (=Souls for the Lamb). Pietism moreover tended to have a rather onesided vertical dimension, with little understanding as regards man's cultural relationships and Christ's universal kingship.

Gradually, however, uneasiness developed over this narrow missionary aim. This manifested itself particularly in German missionary circles, where, during the course of practically the entire 19th century, p. 248 a debate was conducted on the question whether the aim of mission should be 'Einzelbekehrung' (the Pietistic 'conversion of the individual') or 'Volkschristianisierung' (the christianization of a people as an ethnic unit). The emphasis gradually shifted towards the latter. 'People' ('Volk') increasingly became a normative factor in the establishment of younger churches.

In Anglo-Saxon missionary circles this was the time of the 'three selves' of Venn and Anderson: the aim of mission was the founding of self-governing, self-propagating and self-supporting churches. Thus Venn and Anderson also moved away from the earlier Pietistic understanding of mission. They shared the Germans' misgivings in this respect. Yet unlike the Germans they did not emphasize culture and ethnicity as constituent factors in the founding of younger churches.

ALL THE NATIONS

Of special interest, in this respect, is the 'Great Commission' in [Mt. 28:19–20](#). This so-called missionary mandate has always played a key role in Protestant missions. In the German debate about the choice between 'Einzelbekehrung' and 'Volkschristianisierung' more and more protagonists of the latter policy began to appeal to the Great Commission. Here Jesus commands his followers to make disciples of *panta ta ethnē*, 'all the nations', which, according to those favouring 'Volkschristianisierung' must surely be interpreted as a charge to found separate ethnic churches.

The best example of this exegesis of *panta ta ethnē* is to be found in the writings of the father of academic missiology, *Gustav Warneck*. In his monumental *Evangelische Missionslehre* he admits that *panta ta ethnē* in the Great Commission has primarily a *religious* connotation: it refers to *Gentiles*, that is, to those nations outside the divine Covenant. He thus concedes that the entire issue regarding 'Einzelbekehrung' and 'Volkschristianisierung' lies outside the scope of the 'Great Commission'.³ Yet he proceeds to argue in favour of the translation of *ethnē* as 'Völker' (= peoples as ethnic units), 'even if scientific exegesis has raised some not unfounded objections to this translation'.⁴ After all, says Warneck, in the practical execution of the missionary commission the *religious*

² Looking at the 1578 ruling from the perspective of the present-day context in the South African Reformed churches, one might easily deduce that the two situations are similar. They are not, however. Individual Dutch- and French-speaking Christians in the Netherlands were free to join congregations of their choice and pastors could be called to any congregation. Structurally, therefore, the Reformed Church was *one*. See my comments on 'kerkverband' towards the end of this article.

³ G. Warneck, *Evangelische Missionslehre* III/1 (2nd edition). Gotha: Perthes 1902, pp.247–250.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.251 (my translation).

antithesis in which the *ethnē* stood to Israel became an *ethnographic* one.⁵ History thus proves the correctness of the p. 249 suggested translation; moreover, it should be remembered ‘that the acts of history are also an exegesis of the Bible, and in the final analysis they speak the decisive word when the theological interpretation remains in dispute’.⁶

Without going into detail, I want to mention that Warneck’s exegesis of *panta ta ethnē* dominated the German missiological scene for almost half a century.⁷ German missiology showed a remarkable parallel development with German political thinking in general. The concept ‘Volk’, deeply influenced by Romanticism, was increasingly given a theological weight. For Bruno Gutmann, who worked as a missionary among the Chagga in East Africa, it was difficult to distinguish between a fellow-Christian and a compatriot; through his sharing in the ‘urtümliche Bindungen’ (‘primordial ties’) of blood, neighbourhood and age-group the Chagga Christian was sociologically circumscribed. There was therefore an abiding connection between Church and ‘Volk’.⁸

Warneck also influenced Afrikaans Reformed missionary thinking, particularly through J. du Plessis’ popularization of Warneck’s views in his *Wie sal gaan?*, published in 1932.

I shall return to the South African scene a bit later. For the moment I want to draw attention to the fact that Warneck’s exegesis of *panta ta ethnē* has recently been revived by the American Church Growth movement led by Donald McGavran of the School of World Mission at the Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. McGavran, who frequently quotes *panta ta ethnē* untranslated, interprets it as referring to ‘the classes, tribes, lineages, and peoples of the earth’.⁹ Thus *ethnē* is interpreted purely in an ethnological and sociological sense; Jesus had homogeneous ethnic units of people in mind, ‘families of mankind—tongues, tribes, castes, and lineages of man’, when he used this expression.¹⁰ Several of McGavran’s co-workers, in particular Peter Wagner, concur with his interpretation. As a matter of fact, Wagner finds the homogeneous unit principle not only in [Matt. 28:19](#), but in all of the New Testament. He even believes that there p. 250 were culturally separate homogeneous churches in Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome and Thessalonica.¹¹

I am not suggesting that the Church Growth exponents agree in every detail with Warneck, Gutmann and other German missionary thinkers. At a very early stage in the development of the Church Growth philosophy the American missiologist, Harry Boer, cautioned that by ‘peoples’ McGavran ‘did not have in mind an anglicized version of the German conception of “Volk”, with its idea of the socially unifying and integrating power that arises from the bonds of common blood and common soil’.¹² We ought to take this

⁵ Ibid., p.250.

⁶ Ibid., p.258 (my translation).

⁷ J. C. Hoekendijk’s study of this aspect in his *Kerk en volk in de duitse zendingswetenschap* (Amsterdam 1948) is still unsurpassed in scope and quality.

⁸ Cf. Hoekendijk, op. cit., p.150–152.

⁹ D. A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (fully revised). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, p.22.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.56, cf. p.348.

¹¹ Cf. C. Peter Wagner, *Our Kind of People*. The Ethical Dimensions of Church Growth in America. Atlanta: John Knox, 1979, pp.123–25, 130–31; see also pp.118–19.

¹² H. R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions*. London: Lutterworth 1961, p.179; cf. p.169.

caution to heart. McGavran and his colleagues are far more pragmatic than the Germans. Their concern is church growth, and they firmly believe that churches grow more quickly when they are culturally homogeneous. McGavran repeatedly says, 'Men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers'.¹³ Wagner even finds scriptural proof to support this. The disagreement between Greek- and Aramaic-speaking Christians in Jerusalem, reported in [Acts 6](#), led, according to him, to the establishment of completely separate homogeneous churches in Jerusalem, a decision which, he adds, immediately led to unprecedented church growth, for we read in vs. [7](#), 'The word of God now spread more and more widely; the number of disciples in Jerusalem went on increasing rapidly, and very many of the priests adhered to the Faith' (NEB).¹⁴

The pragmatism of the Church Growth movement is therefore quite different from the ideologically loaded thinking of earlier German missiology. Nevertheless, some uneasiness remains. The Church Growth exponents have now discovered the German missiologists I referred to earlier, particularly Christian Keysser, whom they applaud enthusiastically. Keysser's major treatise, *Eine Papua-Gemeinde* (first published in 1929), has recently been translated into English and published by the Church Growth movement.¹⁵ And one is left with the question whether McGavran and his co-workers do not in fact agree with Keysser's basic presuppositions, for instance when he states categorically, 'Der Stamm ist zugleich die Christengemeinde' ('The tribe is at the same time the Christian Church').¹⁶ p. 251

We do not have time to investigate thoroughly Warneck's and the Church Growth movement's translation and understanding of *panta ta ethnē* in [Mt. 28:19](#). I have recently attempted such an in-depth inquiry else-where.¹⁷ Suffice it to State here simply that I could not find a single New Testament scholar of repute who supported Warneck's exegesis. As a matter of fact, it is not even entertained as a possibility. All agree that *panta ta ethnē* means essentially the same as *holē hē oikoumenō* ('the whole inhabited world'—[Mt. 24:14](#)) or *pasa hē ktisis* ('the entire human world as created by God'—[Mk. 16:15](#)). Where New Testament scholars do differ, is on the question whether *panta ta ethnē* refers to 'Gentiles' (non-Jews) only, or to 'nations', including the Jews. This is, however, a completely different problem. The issue at stake is theological, not socio-anthropological. 'Jew' and 'Gentile' were in Matthew's time essentially *religious* and not *ethnic* terms. G. Bertram, writing on this period, says, 'Judentum bedeutet nicht Rasse sondern Religion' ('Judaism means not race but religion').¹⁸ Similarly, in the Septuagint and Hellenistic Judaism *ethnē* is to be understood almost exclusively in a religio-ethical sense, as 'Gentiles' or 'pagans', and not in an ethno-sociological sense.

A 'THIRD RACE'

¹³ McGavran, op. cit., p.223, and elsewhere.

¹⁴ Cf. Wagner, op. cit., p.123.

¹⁵ C. Keysser, *A People Reborn*. Pasadena: Wm. Carey Library, 1980.

¹⁶ C. Keysser, *Eine Papua-Gemeinde*, 1929, p.235.

¹⁷ See my contribution, 'The Structure of Mission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:16–20', in Wilbert Shenk (ed.), *The Study of Church Growth*, to be published shortly by Eerdmans in Grand Rapids.

¹⁸ G. Bertram, Art. *ethnos*, *ethnikos*, in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Vol.2. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1935, p.362.

It is therefore indefensible to equate the tensions in the early Church between Jewish and Gentile Christians with those between different cultural groupings in our day. There is a tendency in some circles today to see the Antiochian question whether Gentile converts should be circumcised or not, as an issue of cultural adaptation or indigenization. However, it had nothing whatsoever to do with the modern homogeneous unit issue. At stake was not the question whether different churches should be established for different cultural groups. The issue at stake was two different understandings of salvation. It was a matter of theology, not of communications theory. Paul and his co-workers passionately contended that the crucified and risen Messiah has superseded the Law as the way of salvation, and therefore, to demand the circumcision of Gentile converts to the Christian faith was, in effect, crucifying Christ anew. Paul still accepted the principle of division of labour as far as the mission to Jews and Gentiles was [p. 252](#) concerned (cf. [Gal. 2:7](#)), but theological (or 'salvation-historical') difference between the two had been abrogated: the Law was a 'tutor' only until Christ came ([Gal. 3:24](#)).

As a matter of fact, an unbiased reading of Paul cannot but lead one to the conclusion that his entire theology militates against even the possibility of establishing separate churches for different cultural groups. He pleads unceasingly for the *unity* of the Church made up of *both* Jews and Gentiles. God has made the two one, 'a single new humanity', 'a single body' ([Eph. 2:14–16](#)) (NEB). This was the mystery revealed to him, 'that through the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus' ([Eph. 3:6](#) NIV). Paul could never cease to marvel at this new thing that had caught him unawares, as something totally unexpected: The Church is one, indivisible, and it transcends all differences. The sociological impossibility (Hoekendijk) is theologically possible. And so the New Testament describes the Church as first-fruit, as new creation, as the one body of Christ, the 'one new man'. The early Christians called themselves a *triton genos*, a 'third race', next to and transcending the two existing races of Jews and Gentiles, whose enmity was proverbial in the ancient world.¹⁹

THE ROLE OF CULTURE

All this most certainly does not mean that culture is not to play any rôle in the Church and that cultural differences should not be accommodated.

I have already said that there was a time in the Roman Catholic Church when *romanity*, symbolized by the universal use of the Latin language, was normative. Today relatively few would still subscribe to that view. Almost everybody now accepts that the Church should be indigenised, or, to use the modern word, 'contextualized'. The Church indeed has to enter the very fabric of a local community, culturally, sociologically, and otherwise. This is the legitimate element in Church Growth missiology and in the views of Warneck and his followers. Particularly in Protestant churches, which purport to be churches of the *word*, the cultural dimension is of very great importance. The Church must do everything in its power to minister effectively and in a relevant way to a particular socio-cultural community. This cannot and may not be faulted.

However, cultural diversity should in no way militate against the [p. 253](#) unity of the Church. Such diversity in fact should serve the unity. It thus belongs to the *well-being* of the Church, whereas unity is part of its *being*. To play the one off against the other is to miss the entire point. Unity and socio-cultural diversity belong to different *orders*. Unity

¹⁹ Cf. Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1961, p.243.

can be *confessed*. Not so diversity. To elevate cultural diversity to the level of an article of faith is to give culture a positive theological weight which easily makes it into a revelation principle.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN SCENE

Against this background I now want to look briefly at the situation in South Africa, particularly as regards the Nederduitse Gereformeerde (Dutch Reformed) 'family' of churches.

In October 1981 the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk (Dutch Reformed Mission Church) celebrated its first centenary. Perhaps 'celebrated' is the wrong word, for much controversy and even boycotts characterized the centenary festivities of this church that was formed a hundred years ago exclusively for the so-called 'Coloured' people. Later similar separate churches for Black Africans and Indians were formed. Those who opposed the centenary celebrations referred to the DR Mission Church as 'a church born in sin' and as the product of 'sinful intolerance'.²⁰ To this we have to add that leading figures in the three 'Black' Dutch Reformed Churches have in recent years consistently pleaded for a (re-)unification of all four churches. Various sessions of the General Synod of the 'White' church, however, have expressed very little interest in such a union and have tended to write the whole idea off as being politically motivated. So, as far as the 'White' church is concerned, the idea of union appears to be a dead issue. In fact, many White church members and church councils object even to the presence of occasional Black worshippers in White churches.

How has this state of affairs come about? Without reiterating the entire history—a great deal has been written about this in recent years—I would like simply to highlight a few relevant events and issues.

At an early stage of the Dutch settlement at the Cape it became customary to make special provisions for ministry among the indigenous Khoi-Khoen people as well as the slave population which hailed from Indonesia, Madagascar, and East and West Africa. This was in line with the basic Reformation principle of preaching the gospel in the language of the people. p. 254

At no stage, however, was there even the faintest suggestion of a theological justification for the idea of creating separate congregations—let alone a separate church structure ('kerkverband')—for converts from these groups. Once they became Christians they were to enjoy their privileges as members together with the Dutch Christians.

It is true that, by the beginning of the 19th century, suggestions were made from time to time that Holy Communion should be administered separately to converts from paganism and Islam, yet still within the orbit of the same church affiliation ('kerkverband'). This was, however, rejected. An 1829 resolution of the Cape Town presbytery in this regard is illuminating. It resolved, 'that it is compulsory, according to the teaching of Scripture and the spirit of Christianity, to admit such persons simultaneously with born Christians to the communion table'. The Synod of 1834 endorsed this viewpoint 'as an unalterable axiom founded on the infallible Word of God ... and that all Christian congregations and each Christian in particular has to think and act in accordance with it'.²¹

²⁰ Quoted in H. C. Hopkins, Die geboorte van die Sendingkerk, *Die Kerkbode*, 23 September 1981, p.7 (translations mine).

²¹ Both resolutions quoted in W. J. van der Merwe, *The Development of Missionary Attitudes in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa*. Cape Town: Nasionale Pers, 1936, p.149.

If we now jump from the 1830s to the second half of the 20th century, we find a completely different climate and type of theological reasoning. In 1951, for instance, the Natal Synod of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk resolved to establish a separate church for Indians, as it was felt that 'according to our policy of apartheid we ought to minister separately to these groups'.²² In 1974 the General Synod of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk stated, 'The existence of separate Dutch Reformed Church affiliations ('kerkverbande') for the various population groups is recognized as being in accordance with the plurality of church affiliations described in the Bible'.²³ Many similar resolutions over the past 40 years could be quoted.

How does one account for the shift in the past century and a half? It is generally accepted that the turning of the tide can be traced to a fateful resolution of the Synod of 1857. Of course, this resolution must be seen as one among many, as part of an historical process. And yet there is something pivotal about it. The full resolution, in the English translation, reads as follows: 'Synod considers it to be desirable and in accordance with Scripture that our converts from paganism be received and incorporated into existing congregations, wherever p. 255 possible; however, where this practice, because of the weakness of some, constitutes an obstacle to the advancement of Christ's cause among pagans, congregations formed or still to be formed from converts from paganism, should be given the opportunity to enjoy their Christian privileges in a separate place of worship'.²⁴

Of importance for our subject is that of the Synod of 1857

- (1) confessed that it was 'desirable and in accordance with Scripture' for all to worship together;
- (2) did not even remotely consider the possibility of the founding of separate *churches* (denominations);
- (3) made some concessions, not because of theological arguments, but 'because of the weakness of some'.

However, since 1857, and particularly in this century, the situation has changed radically. Today, in the view of many Dutch Reformed churchmen, it is considered (a) to be desirable and in accordance with Scripture' that Whites and Blacks *not* worship together, (b) that separate churches (denominations) be established along racial lines, and (c) that the plea in some Dutch Reformed circles for common worship and church union is to be ascribed to the 'weakness of some'! Indeed a volte-face of 180 degrees!

The question is whether this entire development is simply due to an increase in racial prejudice within the circles of the White Dutch Reformed Church during the past century and a half. Many people explain the whole development in those terms. And I believe that there is an undeniable element of truth in this view. It is, however, not the full story.

In two recent articles on the 1981 centenary of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, published in *Die Kerkbode*, the Revd. Charles Hopkins is at pains to prove that racial

²² *Acta Synodi*, Natal, 1951, p.148.

²³ *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*. Cape Town/Pretoria: DCR Publishers, 1976, p.82.

²⁴ In the original Dutch the resolution reads as follows: 'De Synode beschouwt bet wenschelijk en schriftmatig, dat onze ledematen uit de Heidenen in onze bestaande gemeenten opgenomen en ingelijfd worden, overal waar zulks geschieden kan; maar waar deze maatregel, ten gevolge van de zwakheid van sommigen, de bevordering van de zaak van Christus onder de heidenen in den weg zoude staan, de gemeenten uit de heidenen opgericht, of hog op te richten, hare Christelijke voorrechten in een afzonderlijk gebouw of gesticht genieten zal'.

prejudice was not a decisive factor in the creation of a church for the so-called Coloured people.²⁵ He refers to the crucial rôle played in this regard by the Revd. J. C. Pauw of Wellington, and adds, '... that nobody would ever have suspected the venerable and godly Father Pauw, as he was widely known, of prejudice, uncharitableness and haughtiness toward p. 256 (Coloured) church members ...'.²⁶ I am fully prepared to accept this and concede that Hopkins has proved his point. Nevertheless, Hopkins has erred in his attempt to gloss over the reality of racial prejudice in his apology.

Be that as it may, the real reason for the creation of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk and of several other ethnic churches in the decades that followed, may indeed not have been racial prejudice but, rather, a weak ecclesiology. The 19th century was, in Protestantism as a whole, not a great century as far as the understanding of the Church was concerned. It was the century of denominationalism, when all kinds of groups broke away and new denominations were spawned. This was true of Church life in Southern Africa as well.

As far as the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk was concerned, two theological currents influenced ecclesiological thinking.

The first one was *Pietism*. The emphasis here was on the individual. The Church as a body is of minor importance. The invisible unity of all believers is paramount. The true Church is therefore also the invisible, not the empirical one.

The second influence was that of *Liberalism*. Here the Church is viewed as a man-made society or *collegium* in which like-minded people can gather of their own free will. If you and your little group do not agree with others, you leave and form your own new denomination. If you do not feel doctrinally at home, even on minor issues, you separate yourself and those who agree with you. Likewise, if there are cultural differences, they become an excuse for the formation of separate denominations. The utility principle thus weighs most heavily.²⁷

In this respect W. D. Jonker writes, 'It is a sign of deformation if the Church forgets its own nature and starts thinking and speaking about itself as though it were an ordinary human organization to which the same guidelines of human wisdom apply as is the case with other organizations. It was the typically liberal thinking of the Enlightenment that first led to the idea that the visible form of the Church was of lesser value, so much so that any rules could be made as long as they 'worked' without caring about the indissoluble unity that ought to exist between the invisible, inner being of the Church and its visible p. 257 form'.²⁸ Robert Recker, in discussing the Church Growth approach, puts it even more strongly. He warns against 'a growing virus in the body of Christ' that fosters the formation of different denominations 'upon the basis of very questionable distinctives'. He adds, '... When individual believers refuse any longer to entertain the biblical injunction to be reconciled to their brothers but rather simply run off to find some congregation which mirrors their own foibles, fears, suspicions, prejudices, or what not

²⁵ Cf. *Die Kerkbode*, issues of 23 Sept. and 30 Sept., 1981.

²⁶ *Die Kerkbode*, 23 Sept. 1981, p.7.

²⁷ See further two important contributions in Piet Meiring & H. I. Lederle (eds.), *Die eenheid van die Kerk*, Cape Town: Tafelberg 1979, viz. those by J. J. F. Durand, 'Kerkverband—wese of welwese?' (pp.73–77) and H. I. Lederle, 'Kerkgrip en kerkreg op die pad na kerklike eenheid' (pp.135–146).

²⁸ W. D. Jonker, *Die Sendingbepalinge van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk van Transvaal*. Pietersburg: Studiegroep 'Kerk en Wêreld', 1962, p.19 (my translation).

in the name of feeling 'at home' or comfortable, then something is radically wrong in the body of Christ'.²⁹

The acceptable Christian way, so it appears to me, is rather to bear with one another even to the point of suffering, to forfeit some of our efficiency, for the sake of our unity. But this is perhaps a rather negative reason! There is also a far more positive one: To regard our cultural differences as mutual enrichment, as aids to a broadening of our horizons, as object lessons on the richness of the unfolding of God's works among people.

It goes without saying that any specific local congregation should function primarily within the orbit of one cultural context—as long as we do not define that cultural context too narrowly. But it should always be a congregation with open doors, into which people from other cultural backgrounds are welcomed and in which they are made to feel welcome. If a local church closes its doors to other worshippers, it ascribes soteriological significance to cultural distinctiveness and thus falls captive to an ideology.

This is the tendency I discern in the symposium volume *Veelvormigheid en eenheid*, published in 1978.³⁰ In it F. G. M. Potgieter contends that a people as an ethno-cultural group 'structures' the Church, from which it follows 'that the members of an autonomous church are elected from the ranks of an autonomous nation ... It follows further that the boundaries between autonomous churches for all practical purposes coincide with those between nations. History also teaches that a church becomes independent when the nation becomes independent. Our own history confirms this'.³¹

Potgieter goes even further: within the same ethno-cultural grouping p. 258 there is no room for more than one church (denomination) for people sharing the same confession. On the other hand, Christians of the same confession but of different cultural backgrounds should be divided into different denominations.³² The implication is clear: cultural differences count for more than the sharing of the same confession.

What we find in Potgieter and many other proponents of the idea of separate ethnic churches is a tendency to declare the structural unity of the Church (kerkverband) as something *optional*. That this is the case has been shown clearly by Durand and Lederle in their contributions to the symposium volume on *Die eenheid van die kerk*.³³ They argue cogently that this playing down of structural and institutional unity (kerkverband) is not an outflow of Reformed ecclesiology. Rather, Reformed theology has a high view of the Church and its unity, as can be seen from the classic Reformed confessions (cf. the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 54, and the Belgic Confession, Art. 27). It is stated unambiguously that only faith in Christ and not biological descent or cultural distinctiveness constitutes the precondition of admission to the Church. What we find today in Potgieter and other Reformed exponents of the doctrine of the plurality of ethnic churches is a later development, and as such an aberration.

WHY UNITY?

²⁹ R. Recker, in a review of C. Peter Wagner's *Our Kind of People*, in *Calvin Theological Journal* 15:2, Nov. 1980, pp.303–4.

³⁰ Cf. J. D. Vorster (ed.), *Veelvormigheid en eenheid*. Cape Town: DRC Publishers, 1978.

³¹ F. G. M. Potgieter, 'Eenheid en veelvormigheid prinsipiële verantwoord', in J. D. Vorster (ed.), op. cit., p.29.

³² Cf. op. cit., pp.29–30.

³³ See footnote 27.

Those of us who plead for the re-unification of the four Dutch Reformed Churches, currently separated along racial lines, and for open church doors during the period that negotiations regarding church union are still in process, are often asked *why* we make an issue of these matters. The answer is simple: The breaking down of barriers that separate people is an intrinsic part of the gospel. What is more: it is not merely a *result* of the gospel, allowing us first to group people together in separate, homogeneous churches, in the hope that one day they will reach out beyond their own narrow confines. Experience teaches us that this does not happen; rather, the homogeneous group simply entrenches itself more and more in its sectional church. But more important than experience is the fact that the New Testament teaches us differently. Evangelism as such itself involves a call to be incorporated into a *new* community, an alternative community. As René Padilla puts it, 'It may be true that 'men like to become Christians P. 259 without crossing barriers' (as McGavran puts it—DJB), but that is irrelevant. Membership in the body of Christ is not a question of likes or dislikes, but a question of incorporation into a new humanity under the lordship of Christ. Whether a person likes it or not, the same act that reconciles one to God *simultaneously* introduces the person into a community where people find their identity in Jesus Christ rather than in their race, culture, social class, or sex ...'.³⁴

In conclusion: In regard to the subject under discussion and the way it is viewed by the current Dutch Reformed Church leadership, I cannot help sharing Paul's agony in respect to his fellow-Jews. In [2 Cor. 3:14–16](#) he says that their minds have been made insensitive, for there is a veil that obscures their reading of the Old Covenant. So they cannot see and hear what it really says. I observe a similar veil preventing the Afrikaans Reformed churches from really hearing what the Bible says about the unity of the Church. I say this not in a spirit of judgement, but of shared guilt and of deep concern. Of course, other denominations have *their* limitations and blind spots too, in regard to other central issues of the Gospel. That, however, is not the subject of my paper today. My concern is with a specific blind spot, that of being unable to catch a vision of a church truly transcending the divisions of mankind.

Let me add that I firmly believe that this particular form of blindness is not part of the true Reformed tradition. The Afrikaans Reformed churches have only to return to their own roots to discover that what they now cherish is nothing but a heresy that strikes at the very foundation of the Church. Because of this heresy the Afrikaans Reformed churches have designed a missiology tailor-made 'for churches and institutions whose main function in society is to reinforce the status quo', and where the church becomes little more than a pale reflection of its environment. It is a missiology 'that conceives the People of God as a quotation taken from the surrounding society', instead of one 'that conceives (the Church) as "an embodied question-mark" (John Poulton) that challenges the values of the world'.³⁵

In summary, then, I am not suggesting an easy solution to the issue that is the subject matter of this paper. There must be room for cultural distinctiveness in any specific empirical church. People must be able to feel at home in the church, and this includes culturally. But this should never be regarded as something that militates against, let alone p. 260 excludes, the indestructible unity of the Church. This is the danger in the Afrikaans Reformed churches today. Naturally neither should the argument in favour of unity be employed to bulldoze Christians into an amorphous sameness. This was the mistake made in times past by Rome. Rather, let us strive for a gentle yet dynamic tension between the

³⁴ C. René Padilla, 'The Unity of the Church and the Homogeneous Unit Principle', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 6:1, Jan. 1982, p.24; cf. p.29.

³⁵ Padilla, op. cit., p.30.

particular and the universal, to the mutual enrichment of all and to the glory of Him who is the Head of his one body, which is the Church.

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A Letter to the Editor The Homogeneous Unit Principle

Charles R. A. Hoole

The importance of Donald McGavran's article (Oct. '83) lies in its description of an actual situation. But it is not a new situation. Protestant churches have been operating along these lines for a long time. Yet I find McGavran's De Nobili solution totally unacceptable. As René Padilla has shown with clarity, that it is contrary to the New Testament view of Church. In addition, there are sound ethical grounds for rejecting McGavran's recipe.

The De Nobili solution assumes that a believer can continue in faith as a private being, living his life in the quiet chamber of a devotional relationship to God. This faith doesn't have reference to the whole of reality in which the believer finds himself, including that of his work, and of political, social and economic life, where most people experience their real problems of conscience, their conflicts and personal difficulties. The De Nobili solution therefore ignores the liberating significance of the Gospel for all these dimensions of life. Isn't the believer then in danger of succumbing to schizophrenia? As indicated in case history I., the believer must live a life that is divided into two separate compartments. In his private life he will be a believer living, as it were, supernaturally in a kind of superworld. But as a man of the world he will follow the laws of the world. Even if such a precarious balance could be maintained by the practice of 'double morality' (Troeltsch), it remains a highly unsatisfactory solution. There are, however, dangers inherent in this position that leads the believer along the downward path.

Indeed the De Nobili solution had led to all manner of perversions of Christian faith. Are we to be reminded of Karl Barth's characterization of the typical eighteenth century man in Europe as one who was pious at home but hunted slaves abroad? (Barth, Nineteenth century Theology). While allowance should be made for Barth's polemics, the memories of the Nazified 'German Christian' of the Third Reich are too vivid to be forgotten. The 'German Christians' did believe in 'The Priority of Ethnicity'. According to one of their advocates: 'As inner man the Christian acts within the Kingdom of God wholly intent upon fulfilling the morality of the divine goodness, but as secular man he follows in his office the autonomy of the world in pursuing a morality of force and of power'. The product of McGavran's principle in this context is not even a half Christian humanity!

McGavran's attempt to accommodate faith to the structures of the world and its laws, will invariably lead to a pragmatic synthesis; and is [p. 262](#) therefore a recipe for disaster. As such, it becomes a perversion of true faith.

However, in future missionary strategies, it is the American religion that should be taken as a model for understanding McGavran's Church Growth theory. In an American religious map, faith has to operate in a world defined by the American Way of Life. The

Fundamentalist-Evangelical, Pentecostal-Charismatic and other groups have operated successfully during the period after the war and have been rewarded with steadily increasing membership. But numerical increase has been matched by a qualitative depreciation of Christian faith. Even in the mid sixties Peter Berger observed that Christianity instead of creating its own values was in the service of secular values. More recent studies have shown that Civil Religion, is the American Way of Life (Will Herberg) is the real religion of the American people. Christianity, with its numerous denominations still has a provincial rôle in locating a person's particular identity in one vast religious map. Denominational boundaries may be crossed, but all must participate in the structure of the whole, the religion of American Way of Life or American Shinto, which stands above Christianity with its own set of ideas, rituals and symbols (Marty, Martin E., *A Nation of Behavers*, 1976, p.180–202). Under these circumstances the believer may continue to listen to sermons and participate in the sacraments on Sundays, but from Monday to Saturday, they become totally irrelevant to what he does.

The American scene shows that numerical growth can indeed be achieved along the lines suggested by McGavran. But it leads to a complete distortion of faith. Christian faith is reduced to a cultural religion, like Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam (as such it is also of an ideological function during national emergencies). We would do well to reject McGavran's De Nobill solution. A true confession of God is possible only by confessing also against a background. Thus it involves a revision of all the existing boundaries in the light of the Gospel of our Lord.

(A Sri Lankan student at the University of Hull). p. 263

Paul's Context and Ours

Wright Doyle

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In a clear and lucid style the author portrays the social, political and religious life in Rome in Paul's day. He surveys the content of Paul's message in this disturbing context and draws some parallels between Paul's context and that of Asian Christians today. Some of our readers may feel that Paul's message was more radical in social transformation than this author suggests. Readers are invited to respond to the practical implication of Paul's Letter to the Romans for their own context. The editors welcome letters to the editor.

(Editors)

As we try to communicate the gospel in Asia, we can be encouraged by Paul's example. In many ways, he faced a situation similar to what Christians in Asian countries encounter.

PAUL A JEWISH CHRISTIAN

Paul was a victim of discrimination and oppression. As a Jew he belonged to a despised race. Noted for their narrow-minded bigotry, Jews elicited a hostile response wherever

they went. Judea was one of the most troublesome districts of the Roman Empire, because the people were constantly rising up in protest or rebellion. Revolutionary sparks kindled into a bonfire just shortly after Paul's death, and led to the total destruction of Jerusalem.

Even in tolerant Rome, where people from all over the known world dwelt in comparative harmony, Jews faced persecution: We first hear of Priscilla and Aquila as those who had been expelled from Rome along with all other Jews by Claudius ([Acts 38:2](#)). When Paul preached in Athens, he was accused of 'advocating *foreign* gods' ([Acts 17:18](#)). He did not belong to their culture. He brought 'strange ideas'. He was an outsider.

As a Christian, Paul faced bitter, murderous hostility from fellow Jews. In one place after another, they mobbed and beat him. This rejection by his own people nearly broke his heart, as [Romans 9:2](#) testifies. He had perverted their ancient religion and was blaspheming their God—or so they imagined. He was a traitor to the customs and traditions of his own race. He must be killed.

Whether as a Jew among Gentiles, or as a Christian among Jews, Paul encountered constant rejection. A foreigner with strange ideas, a traitor to his own people—these were the categories in which he was seen. [p. 264](#)

As a Jewish Christian, Paul was powerless. He could be beaten or imprisoned whenever a mob or a magistrate willed. His Roman citizenship brought relief at certain crucial times (notably in Jerusalem as he was about to be torn to pieces by a Roman whip). But it could not protect him from danger. He had no influential friends to get him out of prison in Caesarea ([Acts 24:26–27](#)). In the end, all he could do was exercise his right to appeal directly to Caesar in Rome. He came to Rome, then, as a prisoner. He remained in that position for at least two years, as Luke tells us at the end of Acts ([28:30](#)). Tradition holds that he was tried and then released. Within a very brief time, however, he suffered death under the persecuting wrath of Nero.

ROME UNDER THE EMPERORS

Paul was not the only powerless person in Rome. Slaves constituted at least one third of the total population. They were bought and sold like property, which they were in legal fact. They could be beaten or killed at their master's whim. Some of them fared well in the homes of wealthy Senators, but others worked for long hours under miserable conditions in the teeming metropolis. No freedom at all, no power, no hope, unless they could somehow be sold to a better master or perhaps even bought out of slavery.

Rome—the very name conjures up images of pomp and power. For almost two hundred years, the Romans had been enlarging their empire by ruthless warfare and skilful diplomacy. They had controlled the Mediterranean basin for a hundred years by the time Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome. Everyone had to pay taxes to Caesar. Common citizens had to help soldiers carry their packs. Although local autonomy was granted in some places at certain times (Herod the Great ruled with limited freedom when Jesus was born), Roman rule meant submission to the Emperor. Any sign of rebellion brought swift and harsh reprisal, as the city clerk reminded an Ephesian mob ([Acts 19:40](#)).

Despite its noble tradition and partial success, Roman law often operated for the benefit of those who could bribe the right official ([Acts 24:26](#)). It was often a matter of 'whom you know', not whether you are in the right.

Under these circumstances, slaves like Onesimus often ran away or even revolted, and peoples like the Jews occasionally rose in violent revolution. Out of fear of offending Caesar, cautious men throughout the Empire kept quiet. The ringing eloquence of Republicans had been silenced forever. Freedom of speech almost ceased to exist as one

man [p. 265](#) after another competed in praising rulers notorious for their inefficiency or cruelty (cf. [Acts 24:2-3](#)).

Who were these Emperors?

Augustus, the first to hold total power, ordered the census which led to Jesus' parents' trip to Bethlehem. He had acquiesced in the judicial murder of freedom-loving Cicero. Thereafter, he consolidated power by waging a successful war against Mark Anthony. In one move after another, he showed that a new era had come. He accepted titles which, taken together, assumed almost the nature of deity. As the adopted son of 'deified' Julius Caesar, he was officially 'the Son of God'. Offerings and sacrifices were made to his statue, which was taken to represent his spirit. A month (our August) was named for him. The title 'Augustus' invested him with supra-human status. He was widely worshipped in both the Eastern and Western parts of the Empire. Altars were built to him, and became the focus of political loyalty. He took over the ancient position of high priest, and thus became the head of Roman religious life as well as of the state. When he died, the Roman Senate 'decreed that he should be accepted among the gods of the State'.

Augustus was followed by Tiberius, who built a special altar to him. Rome's second Emperor inspired terror by his frequent purges for treason; in these, more than one hundred nobles perished, including members of the royal family.

Gaius (nicknamed Caligula) came next. This man loved power so much that he refused to wait to be declared divine by the Senate upon his death. He deified himself. When Jews pulled down an altar built for him in Palestine, Caligula called their leaders to account. Enraged, he organized an expedition aimed at setting up a statue of himself in the Temple at Jerusalem. Only his assassination prevented the bloody confrontation that would have ensued upon such an attempt.

Out of a desire to remain on friendly terms with the quarrelsome Jews, his successor, Claudius, began his reign by rescinding the order for that ill-fated expedition. Eight years later, however, riots in Rome involving the Jews led to their expulsion from the capital by Claudius. It was at this time that Aquila and Priscilla came to Corinth from Rome ([Acts 18:2](#)). These riots may have resulted from strife between Christians and Jews, for there were already large numbers of believers in Rome.

Such disturbances accompanied Paul wherever he went as we have seen, and placed him in an unfavourable position. He could be labelled as an instigator of political unrest, a threat to the peace. At least, he was so charged in Thessalonica: 'These men who have [p. 266](#) caused trouble all over the world have now come here ... They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus' ([Acts 17:6-7](#)).

Another king! Surely this comes from calling Jesus Lord (*kurios*) in a state where only one man could properly be called lord of all the earth: Caesar. In Roman eyes, Paul was then not only a despised foreigner, but possibly a revolutionary.

Nero followed Claudius. Immediately, he laid claim to a miraculous childhood, and stressed his descent from the deified Augustus. He accepted the praise of flatterers who hailed him as Apollo incarnate because of his support for the arts.

Early in his reign, he had his rival and step-brother poisoned. His mother he first sent into exile, and then murdered. At about the time Paul made his appeal to Caesar, Nero was divorcing his wife and having her executed. Thereupon, he married his best friend's wife. Not only so, but he also revived an old law which allowed the death penalty for offending the Emperor by word or deed.

His extravagance and pride helped to make him unpopular. Some thought that he started the great fire of AD 64 in order to clear the ground for a huge palace. At any rate, he blamed the Christians for that disaster, and had many of them tortured and killed. Tradition places Paul among those martyrs.

STOICS AND EPICUREANS

When Paul wrote Romans, what kinds of ideas influenced the public mind? The following brief summary relies heavily upon F. F. Bruce's *New Testament History*, used because of its general availability to students.

The most popular school of thought at that time was Stoicism. Stoics believed that a rational principle permeated the universe and informed all of life. This they called the *logos*. All creatures, including men, find their integration in this world-soul, which is reason. In fact, everyone has a spark of divinity in him. Thus, a Stoic poet could say of God, 'We are his offspring', as Paul quoted him in Athens. But this 'god' was not the Creator, but an impersonal, all-pervading mind.

Stoics believed also in fate. A man's destiny in life is part of the universal *logos*, the fundamental plan of the world. We cannot change our fate, but we can co-operate with it.

If life became intolerable, the Stoic could commit suicide. He believed that his soul survived death, but would be burned up the next time the universe was consumed by fire. Stoics had no linear view of [p. 267](#) history, as the Bible does. Things went around in circles throughout eternity.

Epicureans have received bad publicity from some quarters because of excesses. Their original theory called for disciplined enjoyment of the good things of life, especially food and friendship. They were total materialists. Atoms, colliding and combining by chance, formed into the world as we see it. Even the soul was material. Thus, when our body dissolves at death, our soul will too.

Epicureans urged a simple and cautious life-style, free from disturbing cares. Seek pleasure; avoid pain; do not become involved in this world's controversies, for nothing really matters. Only our senses can give us reliable information about the world, so all non-material information and ideas must be rejected out of hand.

Both Stoics and Epicureans found it difficult, in fact, to refute the Sceptics. Profound doubt pervaded the ancient world. We cannot know anything for sure, and what we do know gives precious little comfort. The best thing is either to strive to do our duty with the Stoics, or seek for personal pleasure with the Epicureans.

Epicureans and Sceptics denied the existence of the gods. Stoics 'demythologized' the ancient stories and turned them into allegories with moral lessons. But the masses flocked to temples and shrines for help and comfort in time of need.

We have already mentioned the required worship of the Emperor. This stemmed originally from filial piety, the central virtue of Rome. In his great epic telling of the founding story of Rome, Vergil makes the filial piety of Aeneas his theme. All that this ancient ancestor did was aimed at bringing his household gods to Italy.

Every home had its household gods (the *penates*), which were kept in a cupboard. Worship of them formed the centre of family life and religion. In addition, the *lares* represented the spirits of the dead, who must be honoured and feared. Any food falling on the floor had to be burned before them.

Crossroads, old trees, groves, rivers, and a multitude of other places all contained shrines where the faithful offered food or incense to express thanks for safety in travel, or requesting prosperity, children, or health. In Rome itself, tourists can still see impressive remains of imposing temples to Jupiter and other gods. Everywhere you turned, you saw a temple or an idol. Every official function opened with a sacrifice to one or more of the gods. Coins, buildings, paintings—all featured these mythical beings. Literature abounded with stories about the gods, some of whose actions caused sensitive readers to blush with shame. Even the theatre, the most popular pastime of the [p. 268](#) day, portrayed the exploits of the gods in dramatic and often pornographic form.

All festivals were occasions for worship of some god. Lavish sacrifices were offered to his image at his temple; games, drama, markets and merry-making followed. Most of these fell at the full moon. Everyone took part. If you did not, you were considered subversive, for these festivals also celebrated the solidarity and loyalty of the people.

MORALITY IN ROME

The capital city manifested most of the characteristics of the Empire. When Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, they lived in a metropolis with one million people. The rich had fled the inner city and lived in spacious homes on hills surrounding the crowded valleys. Masses of common people crowded into tenement houses four and five storeys high and jostled with each other in congested streets.

Impressive engineering brought fresh water to the city through aqueducts and supplied the heated public baths where those who could afford it spent much of their leisure time. Theatres, temples and porticoes all boasted the elegant marble and ornate design of a wealthy but decadent Empire.

From all over the Mediterranean, hopeful people flocked to the city to find their fortune. Slaves, of course, could only hope for freedom. But others could beg, steal or bargain their way to wealth and power. Each outlying district provided its own distinctive flavour. The result was a mixture of East and West, old and new. You could hear a dozen languages in those busy markets, and attend the services of dozens of different religions from all over the world.

As you might expect, morality plunged to new depths in this setting. Urban anonymity replaced corporate responsibility. No one knew where you came from or who you were, and no one cared. The old Roman family system, once the foundation of public and private virtue, crumbled. Augustus could enact legislation against adultery, but could not prevent his own daughter from breaking the law. He could censor the works of the poet Ovid, but could not keep avid readers from devouring his advice on how to seduce a virgin.

Vergil wrote of Aeneas' filial piety, and reminded the people that Rome became great through self-sacrifice and fidelity to one's ancestors. Meanwhile, his audience, including the royal family, outdid one another in extravagant living and ruthless infighting.

Homosexuality, glamorized by Plato centuries before, flaunted itself on the stage and in the best-selling poetry. These two media—drama [p. 269](#) and poetry—undid the lofty counsels of moralists like Seneca whose brother Gallio acquitted Paul in Corinth ([Acts 18:15](#)). His Epistles abound with wise and noble thoughts, but his own life was marked by luxury which undermined his credibility.

CONTENT OF PAUL'S MESSAGE

Paul wrote his most famous Epistle to an existing church founded (probably) by Peter's Roman hearers on Pentecost Day ([Acts 2:10–11](#)). This congregation contained both Jews and Gentile converts. Their faith was being 'reported all over the world' ([Romans 1:8](#)). Paul wanted to visit them, not only to 'impart to them some spiritual gift to make them strong', but also to be encouraged by their faith. He had another hope: that they would participate with him in the evangelization of 'regions beyond' ([16:24](#)).

Thus, although Paul was convinced that they were 'full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another' ([15:14](#)), he felt a holy boldness to share with them what God had given him. We have looked briefly at *some* of Paul's context, especially the context of his letter to the church in Rome. Now let us glance at his content.

He begins by identifying with his readers, many of whom were slaves: 'Paul, a slave—of Christ Jesus' (1:1). He, too, is a slave. But, his master, Jesus Christ, was Lord of all slave-owners. In calling himself a slave, Paul dignifies all humble services and relegates all human authority to second place.

Why? Because, though the Emperor may be descended from Julius Caesar or Augustus, Paul's master, Jesus, was descended from the ancient king David. Furthermore, this Jesus, unlike any deified Caesar, rose from the dead. In this way, God showed that he is not only the son of man, but also the Son of God. He is LORD—and here Paul invests Jesus with the divine title of Israel's covenant God.

Because Jesus is LORD, he has authority to command obedience of all people everywhere. His ambassador Paul carries a commission to demand faith in and allegiance to Jesus.

What an opening! Think of the excitement among Jewish and Gentile readers alike, as Paul reminds them of their privileged position. Others may despise them as renegades and foreigners, but they are 'called to belong to Jesus Christ'. They are 'beloved by God'. In that moral cesspool they are called to be saints, 'the holy people of God' (1:7).

Philosophers might scoff at their simple faith, but Paul glories in the p. 270 gospel. After all, 'it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes', both Jew and Gentile, wise and foolish alike (1:14–16).

The degradation all around them is evidence that 'God's wrath is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness' (1:18). The philosophers claim to be wise, but their thinking has become 'futile and their foolish hearts (are) darkened'. Although they claim to be wise, they are really fools.

Idolatry and superstition arouse not only our pity, they also elicit God's anger. The stupid things people do to themselves and to each other result from false thinking and misdirected worship. Men are without excuse.

As the letter progresses, we can hear allusions to the total context of Paul's Roman readers. Jewish legalists, proud of their rich religious heritage and perhaps contemptuous of recent Gentile converts, wither under Paul's scathing *exposé* of their hypocrisy. The good things that a Gentile, as a creature of God, might do by nature, receive commendation (2:26).

Lest anyone become proud, Paul showed that 'all have sinned' and must be 'justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus' (3:23–24). The nature of faith, which brings justification, finds its best illustration in the story of Abraham who was so beloved by the Jews (chapter 4).

Christian discipleship is seen as a new slavery. This time, however, the 'slavery' to Jesus and that alone constitutes moral freedom. Jewish law forms the background for references to remarriage in chapter 7 and the basic framework for Paul's honest cry, 'What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?' (7:24).

The Roman practice of adopting sons provides Paul with a striking metaphor: 'You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again, to fear, but you have received the Spirit of sonship (or *adoption*). And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father' (8:15).

All men, not only intellectuals, wonder whether the frustrations of life will, ever end, and whether this life has any meaning. Filling in the gap that Roman historians left, Paul outlines a doctrine of creation, fall, providence, and ultimate redemption that satisfies the mind and heart alike. 'In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose' (8:28). Others may accuse us, but 'If God is for us, who can be against us?' (8:31). We may be surrounded by the powers of spirits,

exposed to suffering, and threatened with death itself, but nothing 'in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (8:39). p. 271

Turning to the burning theological question of the day, the place and authority of the Old Testament, Paul explains the relationship of the Old and New Covenants (chapters 9–11). Here he appeals both to Scripture and to reason with a few metaphors added for point and power.

Practical questions must not be ignored, for Paul knows nothing of academic theology. Service in the church comes first, since the church is nothing less than the body of Christ. Submission to the state follows. What?! Submission to the Emperor? Yes—even to Nero. Like Jesus before Pilate, Paul affirms that even the most depraved ruler has no power except what has been given from above (John 19:11). With all its flaws, all its injustice, its oppression and corruption, the Roman rule must be obeyed, for the magistrate is 'God's servant' (13:4).

Turning from public morality, Paul warns his readers not to take part in the manifold vices and seductive pleasures of the debauched world around them, for Christ will return soon. At this point, someone would ask, 'How do I exist in a milieu of idolatry? Are you calling me out of the world altogether? Why, I can't even eat meat unless I eat what has been offered to idols!'

Unlike many arm-chair theologians, Paul hastens to grapple with this vital issue, and gives sane advice. Let every man follow his conscience, living for the Lord. At the same time, let us not do anything that causes another brother to fall into sin through our example. Above all, in secondary matters, let love and mutual acceptance prevail.

Paul closes this masterpiece of contextualized theology with a return to his own concerns: his missionary trip to Spain; the offering for needy Christians in Jerusalem (they call it 'social action' today); danger from the religious establishment in Jerusalem which might prevent him from realizing his plan to visit Rome.

Finally, Paul 'personalizes' his theology even further by sending greetings to believers in Rome from himself and his fellow-workers. A sombre note comes in the form of a warning to 'watch out for those who cause divisions ... Keep away from them' (16:17).

PAUL'S CONTEXT AND OURS

Perceptive readers will already have observed that Paul's Roman readers faced a context similar to ours in Asia. By way of summary, let me just mention some common elements:

Authoritarian or even tyrannical governments, riddled with corruption and often hostile to Christians. p. 272

Suspicious neighbours who believe Christians to be peddlers of a foreign religion, traitors to their traditional culture, or even dangerous revolutionaries.

Proud intellectuals, educated in logic and reason but ignorant of the power of the one true God, contemptuous of Christians and intolerant of our faith.

Idoltrous masses, enslaved to superstition, fear, and false worship—a pervasive presence of demons.

Crowded cities, overflowing with hordes of common people trying desperately to earn a living in the face of exploitation and corruption.

Debased morals, assaulting the conscience through every medium of art and entertainment.

A small and outcast church, divided by controversies over theology and practice, powerless, persecuted, but faithful to her Saviour through it all.

What would Paul say to those living under unjust governments? Would he countenance throwing off the yoke of foreign domination or of internal oppression? How

could the one who submitted to Roman rule under the Caesars favour church involvement in revolution? Surely, Paul would urge believers to obey their rulers, even unjust ones. He would remind us that our hope is in heaven, not on earth. He would not appreciate the churches which spend most of their energy on political and social reform. The kingdom of God which he preached was not 'meat and drink' (bound up with life on this earth) but 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit'.

Paul could sympathize with Christians who are hated by their own people. He could not even return to Jerusalem without asking for prayer that he would be protected from his countrymen. To him, however, acceptance by Christ meant far more than rejection by mere men. He would urge us to rejoice at all times in the Lord, and to wait for Christ to return and bring our true identity to light—our position as the sons of God.

To the sophisticated unbeliever, Paul would press the claims of Christ as both reasonable and satisfying. Whatever unbelievers might think, the gospel was the power of God unto salvation for those who believe. He would advise us to show the folly of unbelief and the evidence for our faith, never shrinking in shame before the intellectual.

He too was surrounded by masses of superstitious idolators. He knew the agony of soul that being in such an environment could create. He would remind us to call all men everywhere to repent, and to point them to the only true and living God. For atheists and idolators [p.273](#) alike, he would use the powerful weapon of Christ's resurrection from the dead to elicit faith.

On the other hand, he would never approve of trying to change the gospel to make it more palatable to non-believers. I doubt whether he would even agree with much that we do today to conform to contemporary modes of worship. Anything to do with idolatry he would shun, especially if our actions might cause a brother with less knowledge to sin (This issue pertains directly to the matter of ancestor-worship, of course). The man who preached Jesus as Lord in Caesar's capital would, I suspect, question our excessive subservience to earthly rulers (would he bow to an image of Augustus, as Chinese bow to a statue of Sun Yat-sen?).

In some parts of Asia, Christians come mostly from the middle and upper classes. Paul, on the contrary, identified with lower strata of society. His churches had slaves as well as slave-owners as members. He worked hard with his own hands, living simply in the major cities of the Empire among the common people. He would challenge our church to forsake our comfort and ease and plunge into fellowship with the poor and downtrodden. He would not respect theologians who never leave the classroom to debate in the marketplace.

Our churches reflect the current debasement of morals. Paul would call us back to purity, whatever the cost. He would challenge us to avoid temptations coming from the media, and to transform our surroundings by the power of a changed life and a life-changing gospel.

How he would weep over our disunity! With reminders that Christ—not Calvin, Luther, Wesley or any other great man—was crucified for us, he would beg us to accept one another, and not to think more highly of ourselves (and our church traditions) than we ought to think. 'Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves'. 'If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone'. A church ever in danger of being persecuted cannot afford to fall apart by division. Equally, he would warn us not to co-operate with those who have betrayed the faith he preached.

We could go on. Let us close as Paul does. He had begun his letter by affirming, 'I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes ...' ([1:16](#)).

He concludes on the same triumphant note:

‘Now to him who is able to establish you by my Gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all [p. 274](#) nations might believe and obey him—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen!’

For further reading:

Besides introductions to the standard commentaries on Romans, one may find information about Paul’s context, as well as full bibliographies, in the following works:

1. F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972.
2. C. N. Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, Oxford, 1939.
3. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford, 1970.

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The Human Couple A Biblical Perspective

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To speak of the human couple is to speak of a fundamental factor in every interpersonal relationship: sexual duality. Sexuality (in its masculine and feminine forms) is part of the very essence of the human being and inevitably conditions the way in which we relate to each other. God did not create asexual human beings; he created the man and the woman. And he designed each one in such a way that in their mutual relationship they would discover the meaning of their own sexuality. The human couple provides the necessary context in which man will understand the meaning of his masculinity and woman her femininity.

In this study I will attempt to define that man-woman relationship from a biblical perspective. In the first part, we will see the couple in the context of creation; in the second, in that of sin; and in the third, in that of redemption.

I. THE HUMAN COUPLE IN CREATION

The Image of God

The whole creation account in the first chapter of Genesis is characterized by an admirable sobriety. Without elaboration or embellishment it lists the acts of creation through which, step by step, God prepares the scenario for human life. All that God does

is 'good' because it is perfectly adapted to the divine purpose. And everything points to a climax that gives sense to each act that precedes it: the creation of Man on the sixth day.

The animals also (with the exception of fish and birds) are created on the sixth day, which underlines the solidarity of Man with the animal kingdom. But that does not mean that the creation of Man ceases to be a special act of God, which is obvious in the contrast between verse 24 ('*let the land produce living creatures*') and verse 26 ('Let us make man in our image, in our likeness'). God plans the creation of Man in terms of his own image. And this places mankind in a category apart from all other created beings; it gives us our distinctively human character. The human being is by definition the image of God.

In the history of biblical interpretation, much has been discussed about the significance of the expression 'in our image, in our likeness'. p. 276 The traditional exegesis, especially in Roman Catholic circles, in the past attempted to construct a whole anthropology based on the distinction between *tselem* ('image') and *demuth* ('likeness'). According to this view, on the one hand Man was created with an innate conformity with God, which was a natural gift. On the other hand, Man was created with the capacity to grow and become like God, which was a supernatural gift.¹ However, the way these two words are used in Genesis² does not support this interpretation. Today it is believed that the two terms point out the same truth. Thus the translation of 1:26 in the Popular Version: 'Now let us make man. He will be like us ...'³ At any rate, the text does not state explicitly of what the likeness consists.⁴ This is something one must deduce from the context.

Karl Barth⁵ maintains that one can arrive at the content of the image by way of exegesis. For him the likeness is found in sexual duality, which involves the relationship as well as the difference between men and women. Human beings are like God because, thanks to their sexual duality, in him they reproduce the relationship between the 'I' and the 'you' that is present in God (as is clearly suggested by the plural 'let us make' in verse 1:26). So the image is an *analogía relationis* (an analogy of relationship), not an *analogía entis* (an analogy of being). G. C. Berkouwer⁶ has objected to the ambiguity that Barth is guilty of when he uses the human couple as the model of the relationship between man and his fellow (the relationship between 'I' and 'you') and, at the same time, emphasizes the difference between man and woman (the duality of the human being) as the very content of the image. Even though we cannot deny that there is a connection between the image of God and the capacity of human beings to relate to one another, the text does not support the interpretation according to which the 'analogy of relationship' exhausts the meaning of the image.

A study of the meaning which the images had many years ago in the p. 277 Middle East helps shed light on the interpretation of the biblical text. The conclusion is that in the

¹ For a brief account of the history of interpretation of the image of God in the early centuries of our era, see the work by M. Flik and Z. Aslzeghy, *Antropología Teológica*, Ediciones Sígueme, Salamanca, 1970, pp.100ff.

² In 1:26 *tselem* and *demuth* are used together, while in 1:27 and 9:6 only *tselem* is used, and in 5:1 only *demuth*. In 5:3 both terms are used again, referring to Seth, of whom it is said that Adam 'had a son in his own likeness, in his own image.'

³ *Así comenzó: Libro del Genesis* (Popular Version), United Bible Societies, 1970.

⁴ According to the *Jerusalem Bible*, the purpose of 'likeness' is to limit the sense of 'image', indicating that the resemblance of man and his God is not equality.

⁵ *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, III, 1, pp.182–220.

⁶ *Man: the Image of God*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 1972, p.93.

ancient world, especially in Egypt, the use of the image was associated with the government: image of a particular god, the king was his representative; and the image of the king represented that god in the lands that had been conquered.⁷ This concept is not unlike that of [Genesis 1:26, 27](#): Man is the image of God because he represents him in the world. The figure of the image is even stronger when we realize that the expression appears in the context in which the transcendence of God is emphasized. This God who created the universe and all living beings by his word makes an image of himself and places him in the world as his representative. The essential significance of the description of Man as the image of God is the representative character than Man plays in the world with reference to God. And this interpretation of the image based on the historical context is ratified by the connection between the announcement of the intention of the divine will in respect to the creation of the human being in [1:26](#) ('Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule ...') and the creation account itself in [1:27, 28](#) ('So God created man in his own image ... and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule ...'). To Man, as his image—his representative—God commends the stewardship of the world. His task is to govern the creation, representing God and under his authority. This is the 'cultural mandate,' in the fulfilment of which human beings manifest that they are, in effect, the image of God. The *complete* Man—Man as an organic and spiritual being—resembles God because to him has been entrusted the dominion of the world. And that is where we find the basis for the responsibility of humankind in the use of natural resources and in scientific and technological development.

In relation to our theme it should be pointed out, however, that [Genesis 1](#) does not leave room for doubts about the equality of men and women in respect to their calling in the world. According to verse [27](#), when God created Man in his image, 'male and female he created them.' According to verse [28](#), he told both of them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule ...' The same thought is confirmed again in [Genesis 5:1, 2](#): both share the same humanity, both are variations of the being that God created in his image and likeness, and to which he gave the name Adam (Man). Man [p. 278](#) and woman equally are the image of God. Consequently, man and woman equally are responsible before him for governing the creation.

It is hardly possible to exaggerate the importance that this recognition of the *woman* (and not just the man) as the image of God has for the integration of the human couple. Even today society is organized according to guidelines set down by a 'machismo' that results in a complete negation of the human calling. There is the idea that the woman's place is to fulfill the mandate of being fruitful and multiplying, because she is made to be wife and mother, while the cultural mandate is reserved for the man. This is a twisting of the biblical teaching. Out of it comes the relegation of the woman to an inferior state in relation to the man, including in the church. In Latin America the problem takes on the dimensions of a tragedy. It is not taken into account that, in the case of the woman as well as the man, over and above their sex is their humanity and that their fulfilment as human beings does not depend on the opposite sex but on the fulfilment of their calling as the image of God.

Woman cannot be defined biblically on the basis of marriage and childbearing. She can be defined only on the basis of the mandate of God—the mandate to have dominion over nature, under the lordship of God and in close collaboration with man. More important than the femininity of the woman is her humanity. So the primary concern of the woman cannot be to be married and have children. If it is sometimes, that is due to the fact that

⁷ Cf. D. J. A. Clines, 'The Image of God in Man,' *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968), pp.80fs.

the women through the years has 'internalized' a self-image that has been imposed on her by man. The most important task of the woman is derived directly from the fact of having been created in the image of God. Her place in the world does not depend on her feminine sex, but on her calling. This is matter of calling, not biology.

This does not deny, however, the sexual differentiation between the man and the woman. The man that God created in his image is portrayed in history necessarily as man or woman. The masculine sex and the feminine sex were created by God, and the sexual duality of Man and the mutual dependence of the sexes form part of the very structure of human history. Neither the man nor the woman can fulfil the calling [p. 279](#) of Man without the help of each other. It is a mistake, then, to think that to fight for the vindication of the women it is necessary to deny her differences in relation to the man. The struggle to eliminate the differences can only lead to an artificial situation, with the danger that the woman will conceive of her liberation in terms of the image of the 'liberated woman' that (once again) man imposes on her.¹⁰ The road to the liberation of women is not found in the denial of the feminine attributes, but in their integration in a lifestyle that gives expression to their human calling.

To Man as the image of God has been entrusted the stewardship of the world. Men and women equally are self-fulfilled as human beings to the extent that they practice their vocation in obedience to God and in close mutual collaboration.

II. 'ONE FLESH'

In the first chapter of Genesis emphasis is put on the origins of the cosmos and the place the Man occupies in it as the image of God. In chapter two, on the other hand, the emphasis shifts from the cosmos to mankind. The rich symbolism of the account communicates forcefully the ties between human beings and nature (man is formed from the dust of the ground) and with God, from whom he receives the breath of life ([v.7](#)).

Thus chapter two reiterates the basic declarations that appear in chapter one about Man: that he is part of the continuing creation (created the sixth day) and that he maintains a special relationship with God (in his image).

In chapter one Man is presented as the culmination of all the creative work of God, in the second chapter we get an insight into the nature of the relationship between the two components of the human couple. But here I can barely touch on the emphases that are found through an analysis of the text.

The first that should be pointed out is that the creation of the woman in this context responds to the need that the man has for companionship. [p. 280](#) At the end of chapter one we read that 'God saw all that he had made, and it was very good' ([v.31](#)). In contrast, in chapter two it is affirmed that, after having created the man and put him in the Garden of Eden, God said 'It is not good for the man to be alone' ([v.8](#)). The inference is clear: the man was not created for solitude, but for communion, for communication with the other. Living alone is dismissed in the very beginning of history. But the companionship that the man needs cannot be provided by the animals that he names and that are essentially different from him, as a human being. For that reason God created the woman.

¹⁰ Here is the root of the problem with many who wish to defend the rights of women in the feminist movement. According to Enrique E. Fabbri, 'it is the whole infrastructure of the society of consumption and material well-being that is implicitly interested in denying that the complete development of the woman should come about through her maternal realization, whether physical or purely spiritual, but always human ... This society fears the true woman who is fully realized through her maternal spirit, so it cheapens her, it makes fun of her, it despises her as one for whom there is no room in this world of the 'new morality.' ('La mujer joven: presente y futuro,' *Revista Criterio*, Vol. XLII, No. 1569, April 10, 1969, p.209.)

It would be arbitrary to deduce from that affirmation—that the woman was created to alleviate the man’s solitude—the inferiority of the feminine sex and the superiority of the masculine. The relationship between the man and the woman is not resolved in terms of a *hierarchical* differentiation, but a *functional* differentiation. In contrast with animals, among which ‘no suitable helper was found’ for the man, the woman is created expressly for him. So he recognized her as bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. And he gave her, not whatever name that came to his mind (as in the case of the animals, over which he has dominion), but his own name: ‘she shall be called *Ishshah* (woman) for she was taken out of *Ish* (man)’ (v.23). Only she can liberate him from his solitude, for a double reason: (1) because she shares his humanity—she is the same as he¹¹ and (2) because she is a woman, and, as such, is made his ezer, his ‘suitable helper’¹²—she is different than he.

The equality and the difference of the woman with reference to the man are basic to marriage. They are the factors which make possible the mutual complementarity from which the human couple finds its meaning. Sexual duality does not find its justification in reproduction, but in the union of two beings whose functions are complemented by each other. This explains how it is possible that [Genesis 2](#) refers to the human couple and the sexual act without even alluding to procreation. In the context of matrimony the woman has worth because [p. 281](#) as a human being of the feminine sex only she can be the suitable helper for the man. The mutual complementarity of the man and the woman is enough in itself to explain the existence of sexual duality. As Otto Piper has written, ‘By giving to the man a woman, and not another man, to accompany him, God shows that sexual differentiation has meaning apart from procreation, and that the companionship between the husband and the wife should be considered the greatest blessing of life.’¹³

According to biblical teaching, God’s primary intention in the creation of the human couple was that between the man and the woman an intimate companionship should be established, a mutual dependence based on the complementary nature of each other. The complementarity of the sexes in itself cannot be reduced to the biological. It includes the whole person, both the man as well as the woman, and communicates to all its mutual relationships a sexual dimension.

Within the framework of biblical interpretation of human sexuality the real meaning of the sex act can be understood. If sexuality is rooted in the creation itself as something that, above all, orients the mutual complementation of man and woman, the bodily union has to be understood as an act in which the husband and wife give expression to the fact of having been created for each other and experience that intimate communion that defines the reason for their sexuality. In other words, the essential function of the sex act is *uniting*. Through it the man and the woman gain the physical and psychological unity referred to in the most basic of all the biblical affirmations concerning sex: ‘the two shall become one flesh’ (v.24; [Matt. 19:5](#); [Mark 10:8](#); [1 Cor. 6:16](#); [Eph. 5:31](#)). ‘In the providence of God, the physical act becomes the expression of sentiments that are so deep they cannot be expressed with words: the external, visible sign of a grace that is so spiritual,

¹¹ ‘The first thing that the superficial observer notices is that women are not the same as men ... But what is fundamental is that women are more like men than any other thing in the world. They are human beings.’ (Dorothy Sayers, *Are Women Human?*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1971, p.37).

¹² It is easy to prove that this expression does not imply the idea of inferiority. In the Old Testament it is applied to God in his function of ‘help’ for his people. Cf. [Exodus 18:4](#), [Deuteronomy 33:26](#), [Psalm 27:7-9](#), [33:20](#), [94:17](#), [115:9](#), 11. Well understood, the description of the woman as *ezer* of the man places her in the honourable position of being the one who provides man with the help he needs.

¹³ *The Biblical Views of Sex and Marriage*, Charles Scribners & Sons, New York, 1960, p.30.

emotional, deep and moving that both participants are committed in the totality of their beings.’¹⁴

This does not deny the relationship between the sex act and procreation. It simply affirms that according to the Bible, sexual desire is not oriented around *the fruit* of the conjugal union, but around *the union itself*, that mutual ‘knowing’ that makes the man and the woman ‘one flesh.’ The significance of sexuality should not be defined in terms of the consequences (children) but in terms of its cause (the man and the p. 282 woman were created with the capacity to mutually complement each other). Before the ‘be fruitful and multiply’ of [Genesis 1:28](#) is the ‘man and woman he created them’ of [Genesis 1:27](#). The first responsibility of the husband and wife is not the transmission of life, but the mutual surrender in love, the joyful acceptance of one’s own sexuality and that of the other.

To limit sexuality to the biological function of reproduction, or to give this priority over the relationship between husband and wife, is to take from it its personal meaning and to place the human couple on the same level as animals. It was precisely the loss of the biblical perspective of sex as something that is part of the very essence of Man, made in the image of God, that led some early Christian thinkers to define human sexuality exclusively in terms of reproduction. According to Saint Augustine, for example, the conjugal act is a ‘bestial’ and shameful act, which can only be justified as a ‘necessary evil’ by the need to preserve the race. According to Thomas of Aquinas, sexual relations belong in the generic order—in that which Man has in common with animals—and conforms, therefore, to the appropriate laws of one’s biological nature. The basis for such ideas is not found in biblical revelation, but in the concepts imported from paganism, particularly from the Stoic and Neo-Pythagorean philosophy. Sadly, this focus, favoured for centuries by the Roman Catholic Church,¹⁶ has so influenced our culture that, for many people among us, the sex act within marriage always needs to be justified by the need to reproduce life. We urgently need to rediscover the unifying reason for human sexuality. The sex act between man and woman is the consummation of a *personal* union that leaves a mark on the couple that cannot be removed. For the human being, in contrast with what it is for animals, the sex act establishes between husband and wife a link characterized by a mutual dependence that marks the two permanently. In the words of Piper, ‘a sexual experience is not only existential, related to the ego of the individual, but also results in a critical connection with the partner.’¹⁷ It cannot be a casual experience, the effects of which the participants can rid themselves at will. In the plan of God, it fulfills the function of uniting them as *one flesh*. p. 283

From this unifying purpose of human sexuality is derived the affirmation of monogamy as a fundamental part of marriage. From the Christian perspective, given the nature of the sexual union, this only can be consummated within the framework of the promise by the husband and wife to be faithful. Outside of this framework, sex loses its human dimension—it ‘animalizes’ itself—since it does not recognize the real reason for human sexuality. In the final analysis, facing the question of ‘exclusivity’ and the durability of marriage, there are only two alternatives: either consider the sex act as an experience that involves the whole person and, therefore, unites the partners permanently in a ‘homogenous’ marriage, or consider it as an incidental, genital experience that does not

¹⁴ Stuart Barton Babbage, *Dios creó el sexo*, Ediciones Certeza, Buenos Aires, p.23.

¹⁶ This focus is the presupposition of much of Roman Catholic teaching concerning the Lord. For example, what is taught in the dogma of the immaculate conception, the virginity of Mary after the birth of Jesus, celibacy and birth control.

¹⁷ Otto Piper, op. cit., p.29.

imply any lasting obligation for the participants. Jesus ratified the first alternative when he condemned divorce, referring to the exclusive nature of the union established through the sexual act ([Matt. 19:3-9](#)).

When marriage conforms to the unifying purpose of sexuality, the worth of the woman does not depend on her ability to be a mother—to ‘give children to her husband.’ It depends, rather, on her being a woman and, as such, not a possession of her husband, but a ‘suitable helper,’ the only person with whom he can experience the relationship of the first couple: ‘The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame’ ([Gen. 2:25](#)).

III. THE HUMAN COUPLE IN SIN

More fundamental than the function of the woman in the matrimonial relationship is the vocation that she has as the image of God. However, function and vocation are not antithetical ideas. It’s obvious that for the married woman, her whole life in which she fulfills her vocation of the image of God has to be translated (at least in part) into her responsibilities as the suitable helper for her husband. Being married is not the unavoidable state through which the woman finds self-realization as a human being. But if the woman marries with a *sense of vocation*, in her marriage she will find the *means* of service for God and her own self-fulfilment.

Why, then, does the woman experience so frequently an absolute disassociation between human vocation and the function that she is called to fulfil in the context of marriage?

Many answers have been explored. Most often the discussion polarizes around the defenders of a feminism that would like to throw overboard every trace of femininity characteristic of women, in order to prove their equality with men, and the sponsors of a machismo that [p. 284](#) proclaims the indisputable superiority of men. The root of the problem is in the division introduced between the man and the woman as a consequence of the fall, according to [Genesis 3](#).

Chapters [2](#) and [3](#) show that the man/woman relationship, according to God’s plan, would be harmonious but not symmetrical, complementary but not egalitarian, reciprocal but not identical for both sexes. Vocation does not depend on biology, but neither does it disown it: ‘As long as only women and not men have babies and nurse them, the dominion of women will be essentially different from that of men.’¹⁸ But sin has taken this sexual difference—precisely what makes possible the mutual complementarity of the man and the woman—and in its place has created a distance between the sexes that manifests itself in the disassociation between vocation and function that the women experiences. For the man she ceases to be *Ishshah*, bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, and become *Eva* (living). Now he sees her, not as his ‘suitable helper’ (a companion who shares all of his life), but as the ‘mother of all the living’ ([Gen. 3:20](#)), a means of reaching a goal strictly linked with feminine biology. From now on that classification of the woman by the man will be characteristic of his attitude toward her. The woman, on the other hand, is torn between her desire to give herself to her husband, and the fear of losing her liberty. The words of God’s judgment on her point that out: ‘Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you’ ([Gen. 3:16](#)). The effects of the fall are seen in the marriage with the load of tragedy that sin brings. As Piper says, ‘by means of her very femininity the woman

¹⁸ Emil Brunner, *Love and Marriage*, Collins, London, 1970, p.223.

is brought from the state of freedom to that of bondage, and the facts show that her hope of enjoying independence with her husband has been only a dream.’¹⁹

The division between man and woman is one of the consequences of sin. As Beatriz Melano Couch says, ‘the first division of mankind was not between master and slave, oligarchy and proletariat, but between the man and the woman.’²⁰

All of history is full of a litany of mutual accusations and rationalizations that prolong the initial rupture expressed in the words of [Genesis 3:12](#): ‘The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.’ Human beings will always have the tendency to project their own problems on others. And in no place are the consequences of this tendency more harmful than in the human couple. [p. 285](#)

IV. THE HUMAN COUPLE IN REDEMPTION

‘There is Neither Male nor Female’

The incarnation marks the advent of a new era. This is the era of the kingdom of God, manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. This is the era of the New Man, the second Adam, through whom God will restore the initial purpose of creation.

The work of Jesus Christ, fulfilled in his death and resurrection, applies to the totality of human existence. It does not have to do exclusively with the salvation of the soul in the distant future, nor is it limited to the religious aspect of life.

It reaches to the very centre of man’s personality and transforms all his relationships. It is oriented to the restoring of the image of God in Man.²¹ It is because of this conviction that the Apostle Paul proclaims the disappearance of divisions between human beings in the context of the new era: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ ([Gal. 3:28](#)).

It is not possible to exaggerate how revolutionary this affirmation is in a world fragmented by differences in race, class and sex. In respect to the human couple, it proposes an equality of the sexes that contrasts notably with the disparity between men and women that was in fashion in the first century. Seen in the light of the creation narration of [Genesis 1](#), the message in Galatians shows that in Jesus Christ a new humanity has broken into history—a ‘corporate personality.’ To use the traditional expression by H. W. Robinson—in which the image of God is restored. In the man that God created in his image, according to [Genesis 1:27](#), there was no separation between the man and the woman: ‘God created man in his own them.’ In the New Man, according to [Galatians 3:28](#), God reconstructs that essential unity of the sexes: ‘There is neither male nor female.’ The basis of unity in Christ: is *in him*—in virtue of their incorporation in the second Adam—that believers form a unified personality in which divisions disappear.

Today, twenty centuries after Paul wrote those words, the unification of the sexes through Jesus Christ is still to be realized in history. In spite of ‘women’s liberation,’ which Jacques Leclercq calls ‘the most important event of our century,’²² in many parts of the world (including Latin America) the woman is still considered to be inferior to man. And the church itself has become a hindrance in the struggle to [p. 286](#) achieve equal rights for

¹⁹ Op. cit., p.99.

²⁰ *La mujer y la iglesia*, Editorial E. Escudo, Buenos Aires, 1972, p.22.

²¹ Cf. Jorge A. León, *La comunicación del evangelio en el mundo actual*, ediciones Pleroma, Buenos Aires, 1974, capítulo II, pp.31 ff.

²² *La mujer hoy y mañana*, Ediciones Sigueme, Salamanca, 1968, p.14.

woman. On the basis of the unifying work of Jesus Christ, we Christians should be the first to understand that building the society of the future cannot be exclusively man's work. It requires the equal support of both members of the human couple. Nor can we be content with mere equality of rights in social, economic and political fields. We have to go beyond that, to the goal of a world in which the affairs of history are totally shared by men and women. 'The winning of rights is the first step and is very necessary. But it's only the first step. We have to take the second, that of mutual openness by both sides, of the authentic, liberating action of encounter and of human approach to each other, that of being just in the *reflection-feeling-and-action* of agreement with the purpose of God in the creation and in the redemptive action of Christ.'²³

V. HUSBAND AND WIFE 'IN THE LORD'

If [Galatians 3:28](#) relates to chapter [1](#) of Genesis, [Ephesians 5:22-23](#)²⁴ relates to the change in chapter [2](#). The same saving work that made possible the unifying to man and woman as the image of God also makes possible the restoring of the initial purpose for the marriage.

The dignity of the sexes underlies the entire passage. It is taken for granted that the man and the woman share the same humanity and can relate to each other as two persons of equal value. They are *Ish* and *Ishshah*, created as beings who are able to mutually complement each other. That is indicated by the reference to an essential part of the matrimonial unit, according to [Genesis 2:24](#): 'They will become one flesh.' Far from negating the sexual differentiation, however, the unity of the couple is accentuated. Those that become 'one flesh' are not merely two human beings (and as such equals), but a man and a woman. The restoring of God's purpose goes far beyond the simple recognition of the equality of the sexes. It affirms that in Christ the man and the woman establish a relationship that recovers the unity that was part of God's plan from the beginning. Redemption does not eliminate [p.287](#) the sexual difference, nor does it annul the functions that correspond to each sex within marriage. On the contrary, it brings the man and the woman to the discovery Of their own sexuality and of the meaning that it has as a unifying element in the human couple.

However, the sexual differentiation between the man and the woman is not limited to the function that each one fulfills in the sexual act. It extends to the function that corresponds to each one in everything they do in their married life. It is not necessary to resort to stereo-types²⁵ to admit with Brunner²⁶ that the physical differences between the man and the woman reflect differences 'in the soul and spirit,' even if these are not as uniform and as complete as the physical differences. The exhortation to the married

²³ Beatriz Melano Couch, op. cit., p.32.

²⁴ For lack of space I limit myself here to a brief discussion of this passage, the richest in the whole New Testament concerning the Christian view of marriage. A more complete discussion would have to include [Matthew 19:3-12](#) and [1 Peter 3:1-17](#). The question of the man/woman relationship *in the church* would require another study, based on [1 Corinthians 11:2-16](#) and [1 Timothy 2:11-15](#). At least some of the difficulties in these passages are resolved in the light of the historical context of the first century. However, still unresolved is the hermeneutic problems raised by the link that Paul establishes between his exhortations and [Genesis 1:26](#) ([1 Corinthians 11:7](#)), 2:18-23 (in [1 Corinthians 11:8](#), 9 and [1 Timothy 2:13](#)) and [3:1-6](#) (in [1 Timothy 2:14](#)).

²⁵ The reference is to the idea that the man is characterized by reason and the woman by intuition, the man by the courage and the woman by tenderness, the man by daring and the woman by dependence.

²⁶ Op. cit., p.22.

woman to 'submit herself' to her husband ([Eph. 5:22](#)) is not teaching that the woman is an inferior being, but that she is a being whose nature adapts more easily to that function within marriage. The fact that the exploitation of women by men at times is based on 'the feminine nature' is a direct consequence of the fall expressed in the words of God to the woman: 'Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you' ([Gen. 3:16](#)). But that the woman sees in submission to her husband something more compatible with the characteristics of her own sexuality is consequence of a voluntary acceptance of the plan of God in creation, expressed in his words: 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him' ([Gen. 2:18](#)). For that reason Paul adds that the submission of the woman is as 'unto the Lord' as a Christian duty. In our society, more totalitarian than egalitarian, the desire to be freed from all paternalism is flourishing. One development has been the 'death of God' complex, to use an expression of Roger Mehl,²⁷ which establishes a necessary contradiction between every idea of authority, on the one hand, and the democratic ideal of equality and fraternity. In this context, and in the light of a long history of abuses committed against the submissive sex, it is not surprising that what has been called to question is the biblical model for the matrimonial relationship: 'However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband' ([Gal. 5:33](#)). Apart from the recognition of the different functions that correspond to the man and the woman in the human couple, however, there is no hope for the survival of marriage. 'Whatever should be the evolution [p. 288](#) of customs and the egalitarian tendency of civilization, it is essential that the man and the woman in no way forget that they have been created *different*, that each one is called to fulfill a distinct vocation, and that sexual differentiation is an essential characteristic of humanity.'²⁸

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Watchman Nee—Church Planter and Preacher of Holiness

Norman H. Cliff

This article brings to light many unknown details of the life and ministry of the influential Chinese preacher, Watchman Nee. The author's analysis of his doctrine of holiness and of the church provides a helpful framework to understand the preacher's writings. Norman Cliff, son of missionary parents, spent the first 20 years of his life in China. He has recently completed an M. Phil. thesis on The Life and Theology of Watchman Nee with the Open University, England.

(Editors)

²⁷ *Society and Love*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1964, p.20.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.41.

On the 10th April, 1952, in the middle of the 'Accusation period' in China when dozens of pastors and workers were falsely accused before vast crowds in the various city centres, Watchman Nee was condemned by a Communist court and sent to a small cell in the Shanghai First Municipal Prison.

That should have been the end of the extraordinary ministry of this Chinese preacher. But events were to take quite a different turn. In 1957 two Chinese manuscripts of addresses given by Nee in Shanghai were translated and published in Bombay by the Gospel Literature Service. The two books, *The Normal Christian Life* and *Sit, Walk, Stand*, expositions of Romans and Ephesians respectively, were soon bought out by Christians in south east Asia. In 1962 these books were republished in Eastbourne, England, by the Victory Press, now Kingsway Publications. The Christian Literature Crusade in Fort Washington, Pennsylvania, likewise commenced to print these addresses for Christians in North America. Further editions have come out nearly every year since in English, as well as being translated into two dozen languages.

By the time Nee died in an open centre in Anhui province in 1972, after 20 years of being orally silenced by the Communist authorities, he was a household name in many parts of the world.

HIS EARLY LIFE

Nee was converted at a revivalist meeting held in his home town of Fuzhou, whilst he was a student at the large college there run by the Church Missionary Society. Soon afterwards he was baptized by an independent preacher in the river Min. The young baptismal candidate's prayer was 'Lord, I leave my world behind. Your Cross separates **P. 290** me from it for ever. And I have entered another. I stand where you have placed me in Christ.'¹

In later years when expounding [Romans 6:1-17](#) in his *The Normal Christian Life* he said, 'The real meaning behind baptism is that in the Cross we were baptized into the historic death of Christ, so that His death became ours ... It is to this historic baptism that we assent when we go down into the water. Our public testimony in baptism today is our admission that the death of Christ two thousand years ago was a mighty all-inclusive death, mighty enough and all-inclusive enough to carry away in it and bring to an end everything in us that is not of God.'²

In his new zeal Nee found the Christians of the missionary societies' churches half-hearted and compromising, and charged that the denominations were weighted down with what was to him manmade traditions regarding baptism, worship and ordination, teaching what was quite foreign to what he read in the New Testament.

And so from 1921 to 1923 Watchman Nee was part of a zealous group of young people who broke bread every Sunday morning in a private home in Fuzhou. During the week in their spare time they marched through the streets wearing 'gospel shirts' and conducting open air services. But soon the honeymoon period for this earnest group was over, and Nee and Leland Wang clashed, the former strongly opposing the need for ordination or for Christian workers to receive fixed salaries. Nee was asked to discontinue fellowshiping with these Christians.

NEE'S PUBLIC MINISTRY

¹ A. Kinnear *Against the Tide*, pp.42, 43.

² W. Nee *The Normal Christian Life*, p.63.

By 1928 Nee had settled in Shanghai. At that time throughout China there were anti-foreign demonstrations and kidnappings. Most missionaries had returned temporarily to their home countries. The future of mission-founded churches was uncertain. Many Chinese pastors had severed their links with western missions.

Renting a property in Hardoon Road seating 100 people, Nee commenced preaching. Convinced of the rightness of his unstructured assembly, free from denominational traditions, he asserted, 'Those who really want to live entirely in accordance with the Lord's truth will know real freedom in our midst.'

Soon Watchman Nee was conducting crowded services in this large commercial port. The congregation included Chinese of all social p. 291 classes, as well as a number of missionaries who had left their societies to support this Chinese preacher, having accepted his severe strictures of western missionary work.

During the 1930s assemblies were established in most of China's main cities. The movement was particularly strong in the provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Fujian. Although Nee had been emphatic that Christians should meet 'only in the name of Jesus', free from denominational labels, the assemblies were soon known as 'the Little Flock'. This arose because Nee had published a hymn book in 1931 called *Hymns for the Little Flock*, taking over the name of the hymn book of the London Party of the Exclusive Brethren in Britain. This name stuck, although Nee was careful to give a different title to his next hymn book.

By the time Mao Zedong stood up in Tian An Men Square in Peking on 1st October, 1949, and announced 'We have stood up', the Little Flock (LF) had over 70,000 members in 500 assemblies. And when the missionaries left China in the exodus of 1951 a number of conservative churches joined this fast growing movement.

STAGE I IN NEE'S PREACHING

The emphasis in Watchman Nee's preaching went through a number of phases. The first stage, little known about in the west, reveals Nee the evangelist, travelling through villages in south China seeking to win converts to the Christian faith. Happily 16 of these addresses have been preserved in a two-volumed book *Full of Grace and Truth*. The sermons are simple, direct and powerful, with homely illustrations taken from Chinese life. Reading through them raises the question as to whether he should not have continued and developed his evangelistic preaching.

STAGE II

Stage II in Nee's preaching was aimed at the instruction and the building up of the spiritual lives of Christians. In 1929 he published his three-volumed *The Spiritual Man*. Apart from his *Concerning our Missions* (later re-published as *The Normal Christian Church Life*) this is the only literary effort planned by Watchman Nee for publication, the other 50 books being records of sermons and addresses given verbally by him and subsequently translated into English.

The young Chinese preacher intended this systematic treatise on the Christian life to be his swan song, his magnum opus. Twenty-four years old and weak with tuberculosis, he was convinced he was going to die soon. Renting a small room in Wusi, Jiangsu province, he shut himself p. 292 up and wrote daily for four months. In these volumes he enunciates his trichotomous concept of man, which he had taken from the writings of Andrew Murray, Jessie Penn-Lewis and T. Austin-Sparks and developed further. The soul, the carnal part of man which has no capacity for the things of God, must be brought under

the control of the spirit, which in turn is controlled by God's Holy Spirit. 'The spirit is the noblest part of man, and occupies the innermost area of his being. The body is the lowest, and takes the outermost place. Between these two dwells the soul, serving as their medium. The body is the outer shell of the soul, while the soul is the outer sheath of the spirit.'³

A further idea was superimposed on this tripartite doctrine of sanctification in 1947. For the previous five years he had been barred by his elders from preaching in the Shanghai assembly, due to his having become Chairman of the Board of Directors of the China Biological and Chemical Laboratories. Nee had launched into this commercial venture primarily to help his full time LF workers have a means of livelihood, as they were suffering financially with rocketing inflation as the Japanese war progressed. But it was never successful. But in doing this Nee had gone against his own public teaching (enunciated in his *Concerning our Missions*) that the Christian worker 'should look to God for divine supply'.

And so when a chastened Nee, penitent for his mistake in leaving the preaching ministry, began his expositions again in Guling and Fuzhou, there is a new emphasis on the need for 'brokenness', based on [Psalm 51:17](#), [John 12:24](#) and [Mark 14:3-9](#). 'The Lord wants to break our outward man in order that the inward man is released, and that both unbelievers and Christians will be blessed'.⁴

STAGE III

Thus from 1929 to 1937 Nee's teaching stressed the spiritual struggle in man's three-part personality. In 1938 the young preacher attended and participated in the annual Keswick Convention in the Lake District. The well-known convention banner 'All One in Christ Jesus' draped over the large tent found little response in his spirit. In an address years later he observed, 'At Keswick there is unity in Christ for one week every year. What about the other 51 weeks of the year?'⁵ In another address he described interdenominationalism as merely 'holding hands over the fence'.⁶ **P. 293**

But the emphasis of Keswick teaching—that victory over sin comes through the spiritual crucifixion of self with Christ upon the Cross—left its mark on his ministry of exposition. Within two years he delivered two series of addresses in Shanghai, which are now published as *The Normal Christian Life* and *Sit, Walk, Stand*. Here Watchman Nee shares his burden that too many Christians have received only half their spiritual birthright—salvation but not sanctification. The living of the victorious life should be 'the normal Christian life', though admittedly it was not the usual.

STAGE IV

The fourth identifiable stage in Nee's preaching centres around his doctrine of the Church. Whilst travelling with Miss Fishbacher of the China Inland Mission through Europe to address Conventions he wrote his *Concerning Our Missions*. Quoting extensively from the Book of Acts (and to a lesser extent from the Pauline Epistles) Watchman Nee criticized

³ W. Nee *The Spiritual Man*, Vol. 1, p.27.

⁴ W. Nee *The Release of the Spirit*, p.11.

⁵ W. Nee *Further Talks on Church Life*, p.132.

⁶ W. Nee *Further Talks on Church Life*, p.95.

denominational missions for their polity, ordinances and structure. The New Testament was the divine blueprint for all time. Believers should meet weekly in the Lord's name. There should only be one church in one locality. The local assembly should be run by elders though formed originally by itinerant apostles.

In his *The Glorious Church* and *The Orthodoxy of the Church* the influence of J. N. Darby, who taught the utter corruptness of the institutionalized Church, is discernible. In the latter book he expounds 'The Messages to the Seven Churches' in [Revelation 2](#) and [3](#). He sees the Church at Thyatira as representing Roman Catholicism, the Church at Sardis that of the Reformation (to him the return of the Reformers to the New Testament was only partial). In the Philadelphian Church he sees the birth of the Brethren movement in the 19th century, a full return to New Testament simplicity; and then the Church at Laodicea the same Brethren movement in the present century, now proud and materialistic.

But in Nee's 'Spiritual Authority' addresses delivered in Guling and Fuzhou in 1948, and 'Further Talks on Church Life', his last addresses before his imprisonment, we see the final evolution of his ecclesiology. The Chinese preacher states, 'If God dares to entrust His authority to man, then we can dare to obey. Whether the one in authority is right or wrong does not concern us. The obedient one needs only to obey ... Insubordination is rebellion.'⁷ [p. 294](#)

Here he is arguing for the authority of apostles in the modern Church—leaders recognized by their spirituality and authority as God's representatives. The historical background needs to be borne in mind. Witness Lee had convinced Nee of the rightness of 'Evangelism by Migration', based on the pattern of the early Christians in Acts going out from Jerusalem caused by persecution and as groups forming the nucleus of new churches. Enthused by this new insight Nee was convinced that if groups of 50 Christian families could be sent from the large assemblies at the coast to new areas inland China could be won for Christ within a few decades. Thus by stressing the importance of unquestioned obedience to the LF leaders he was conditioning his hearers to being ready to be sent to distant parts of China on apostolic authority. Several groups were sent to north west China in this way and formed strong assemblies in unevangelized areas.

WATCHMAN NEE'S MINISTRY IN RETROSPECT

It is now over 10 years since Ni To Sheng's death, and more than 30 years since his preaching ministry was abruptly ended by his arrest and imprisonment. What influence does this Chinese preacher have in the world today?

First and foremost his addresses are being studied in a wide range of 'mainline Church' situations. In the USA Methodist, Lutheran and Baptist pastors are in a number of cases taking their weekly Bible Study groups through such books of Nee's as *What shall this man do?* and *Changed into His likeness*. The writer has observed that many book-stalls in Britain and America are well stocked with his devotional addresses. These are read and studied enthusiastically by Christians of many denominations. Catholic religious communities involved in the renewal movement are making bulk orders for such books as *The Release of the Spirit* and *The Body of Christ a Reality*. The addresses in *The Ministry of God's Word* and *The Spiritual Man* are used as standard textbooks by some fundamentalist Bible Schools.

Secondly the influence of Nee's teaching has been considerable in the various branches of the renewal movement of the third quarter of this present century. Pentecostalism, deeply divided as to the place of the apostle in the modern Church, has

⁷ W. Nee *Spiritual Authority*, p.71.

found from an unexpected source strong support for the authority of the apostleship. The Jesus People, according to the survey by Enroth, Ericson and Peters, read Nee as one of their few extra-Biblical sources. Their 'anti-cultural p. 295 fundamentalism' is attributed to his addresses in *Love not the World*.⁸ The charismatic movement has warmed to his sermons on the dynamics of spiritual living. The present House Church movement (or 'shepherding movement') in such centres as Lauderdale, USA, and Bradford in Britain have adhered to his teaching of 'back to the Bible without human traditions', of 'one church one locality' and most significant of all the authority of apostles, who now demand obedience with regard to marriage, the purchase of a house or change of employment.

Thirdly the LF movement which spread to Chinese communities in south east Asia, Taiwan and North America, appears to be now going in three broad directions. A group of assemblies formed by his colleague Stephen Kaung on the east coast of the USA has been cooperative with all evangelical causes, retaining the best elements in Nee's teachings. Others have kept closely to their leader's principles and practices, remaining undenominational rather than interdenominational, aloof from other Christians in established churches. Thirdly there is the 'Local Church' movement, exclusive and travelling a different doctrinal path to that of Nee.

Lastly, we turn to Watchman Nee's influence on the Church in mainland China. Here a picture is emerging from the post Cultural Revolution period of a five-stream Christian tradition. (i) There are Roman Catholics still loyal to the Vatican. Many of these have been or are still in prison. (ii) A larger group of Roman Catholics are affiliated to the Catholic Patriotic Association, and out of communion with Rome. Bishops acceptable to the government have been irregularly ordained. (iii) There are Protestants, mainly in the towns, in the Three Self Movement (TSM), and like the last group under the control of the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) in Beijing. (iv) There are Protestants, largely in the rural areas though also in the towns, meeting in house groups. Many of these are wary of the RAB. (v) There is another group of Protestants also meeting in house groups who have kept to themselves, still following closely the teachings of Watchman Nee. (From this last group a breakaway has taken place in recent years of believers who have adopted Witness Lee's teachings. Many China watchers feel that the Chinese government is making the fanatical behaviour of 'the Screamers' an excuse for tightly controlling all unaffiliated groups.)

Of the five groups above, Nee's influence can be identified in all the three latter Protestant groups. Regarding the third group, Christians in p. 296 the TSM, it is interesting to note that of the ten Vice Chairpersons of the TSM one is a former member of the LF—Tang Shou Lin. Of the 25 members of the TSM's Standing Committee two are formerly of the LF—Zhang Xian Zhou and Sun Yan Li. Of the 9 Vice Presidents of the more recently formed China Christian Council one is a former LF leader—Yan Jia Le. Of the 22 members of the Council's Standing Committee one is a former member of the LF—Liang Yuan Hui. Of the pastoral team leading the five Open Churches in Shanghai three are former LF leaders.

Mr. Raymond Fung of the WCC has recently published *Households of God on China's Soil*, a selection of 14 stories of Christian communities in China meeting in the 1960s and 1970s for prayer and worship. In these stories there is evidence of LF members joining house churches with Protestants of other traditions. He describes among others the 'East Treasure Jesus Lord Fellowship', a house church which included in its fellowship former Baptists, Presbyterians and Meeting Hall (LF) Christians. On the other hand in one town described by Fung there were three groups of Protestant Christians. Two co-operated

⁸ R. M. Enroth, E. E. Ericson and C. B. Peters *The Jesus People—a Factual Survey*, p.170.

with each other and welcomed all Christians. The third was led by a Deacon Yin, and was a former LF assembly with 40 members. This group had little contact with the other two fellowships, and characteristically believed Christmas to be a pagan festival.

Many of the features of the 'post-denominational Church' in China Nee would warmly endorse. Denominational labels have gone, and groups meet each week 'in the name of Jesus', as he advocated for many years. Most of the pastors are self-supporting and the laity plays a prominent role in Church life—features with which he would be in full agreement. The Church has been freed from the encumbrances of maintaining large premises and of running institutional work, both of which have been taken over by the government. Nee emphasized this approach in his *Concerning our Missions*.

But he would be critical of other facets of Church life in China. Many house churches are led by women, some of whom have assumed this role because their pastor husbands were killed or imprisoned. Women are being ordained as ministers. Nee would strongly condemn this procedure. Then with such widely diverging groups as Seventh Day Adventists, Baptists, Lutherans and Anglicans sharing a house church there has inevitably been considerable 'give and take' in questions of worshipping on Saturday, Sunday or both; on baptism by immersion or sprinkling; and the formal or informal conducting of the Lord's Supper. To Nee making concessions to paedo-baptism, liturgical worship etc. would be unthinkable. To be inclusivist would be to [p. 297](#) dilute and obscure New Testament teaching and practice.

We have observed Nee's undoubted influence in both registered and unregistered churches. Some China watchers estimate the Protestant Church in China to number over 15 million, and from all accounts there is vitality and continued church growth. There is little doubt that the strength and quality of this present day Church is due under God at least partly to the widespread ministry of Ni To Sheng in the second quarter of this century, the preacher whose motto was 'I want nothing for myself. I want everything for the Lord'.

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Preaching in History

James Philip

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The author takes us through the vicissitudes of Church history showing how the Church again and again returned to the use of homily as practised by the Fathers and the exposition of Scripture modelled on the New Testament itself.

(Editor)

The history of the Christian Church down the years shows only too clearly that the high dignity of the Biblical pattern of preaching was often but indifferently maintained, and sometimes and for long periods obscured and lost altogether.

1. CHURCH FATHERS' USE OF HOMILY

In the hundred years or so following the close of the New Testament era there is scanty documentary evidence to enable us to construct a reasonable history of the development of preaching. What does seem certain, however is that the preaching of those days took the form of homily (from the Latin, *homilia*, meaning 'a conversation'). This was essentially a simple, unpretentious address, spoken extempore, although not without preparation, with little in the way of structure, and certainly far removed from the grossly ramified structures of later medieval scholasticism. As time went on, the evidences point to a gradual progression in the homily towards a more orderly structure and more expository character. Historians of this period agree that the movement towards this received its most significant impetus through men like Clement of Alexandria (c. 160–220) and his distinguished pupil Origen (185–254), particularly the latter. Origen was unquestionably a figure of immense and definitive significance in the early Church. One historian maintains that it was 'through him that exegesis and preaching were so firmly united that throughout the history of the ancient church and long afterwards they remain intertwined'. His influence was indeed seminal, in that it set a pattern which was followed and developed increasingly from his time onwards to that of the great and significant figures of Chrysostom (344–407) and Augustine (354–430), with whom the full flowering of the ancient homiletical preaching took place, representing respectively the Greek and Latin branches of the church.

Following them there came, however, an ebb-tide, that led inexorably to the decline of the Middle Ages. With Chrysostom, the Greek church spent itself, and after him there was no really great preacher. ^{p. 299} After Augustine also there was a marked decline for two centuries and a dark period of five or more in the West; and even when western preaching within the Latin church revived, it was a very different kind of preaching, far removed from its expository, homiletic roots, that persisted until the Reformation.

2. PREACHING IN MIDDLE AGES

It is a remarkable, even fateful, phenomenon that following the time of Augustine and onwards through the Middle Ages until the time of the Reformation. The whole concept of preaching, both in form and in content underwent fundamental changes. It is not so much that there was no preaching—indeed, preaching was revived from time to time through the labours of Dominican and Franciscan friars, among others—but rather that preaching had degenerated to a mechanical level, lacking in true inspiration. Several factors contributed to this, and although it would be easy to over-simplify the nature of this retrograde development—and thus be in danger of distorting, even falsifying it—it is possible to trace it, at least in its initial stages, back to the time (before even the ascendancy of Chrysostom and Augustine) when Christianity became the 'official' religion of the Roman empire, in the reign of Constantine. For with the Constantinian era, conditions favourable to the development of preaching obtained, and increased. Christianity became 'respectable', and with the development of worship in elaborate and attractive forms culturally, preaching gradually became more formal and stately. "The development of preaching", as one historian observes, "towards an oratorical form became an integral part of the general ecclesiastical movement."¹

With this, the influence of classical oratory began inevitably to make itself felt. "In the traditional and accepted educational system, rhetorical studies occupied the chief place.

¹ Dargan, *History of Preaching*, vol. 1, p.63.

If educated at all, man was educated in rhetoric.... So when the schools were open to Christians, without persecution or social disfavour, there was an opportunity for them to receive the customary oratorical training from the best teachers ... Also, there hearers were so educated. There was a demand for oratory and rhetoric, and the Church tended to oblige."² Another historian quotes Chrysostom as observing that fashionable people in Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and hundreds of smaller towns, began to speak almost as enthusiastically about the favourite preacher [p. 300](#) of the hour as they spoke of the favourite horse in the races, or the reigning actor in the theatre.³

What was unquestionably already a trend in Augustine's day became more and more a fixed pattern after his time, until in the medieval period the decline of the ancient, traditional Christian preaching was complete. The influence of the scholastic theology of the universities, which from the beginning were clerical institutions, took over, and the combination of theology and philosophy, and the application of Aristotelian logic to the interpretation of Scripture, with its speculation, analysis and ratiocination imposed an intolerable incubus upon preaching which virtually destroyed it as an effective means for communicating the gospel. It is not surprising, therefore, that hardly any counterparts to the comprehensive patristic expositions of complete books of the Bible are to be found in mediaeval ecclesiastical literature.

Another deleterious influence on preaching was the growth in liturgy and forms of worship which led to the spoken word having, and being given, far less relative value, and to confining it within the liturgical context of the Mass, a process which constricted and impoverished it and finally dismissed it to a place so minor as to be practically irrelevant in the life of the Church. The cure of souls came to belong in the context of penance rather than preaching—in contrast to Paul's famous affirmation in [Ephesians 4](#) about 'the perfecting of the saints'.

Furthermore, what attempts the Middle Ages made to be faithful to the Bible ended in tragedy because of the very manner of their use of it, for they followed and developed Origen's allegorical method—this was a most fateful influence very different from the definitive direction he gave to the true expository method!—finding not only double, but triple and even quadruple meanings in Scripture. In this way the possibility of real exegesis was destroyed; the basic rule of interpretation, that everything must mean something else, that the merely explicit or obvious led to uninhibited and all too often absurd spiritualisations. This was one of the major factors in making the Bible a sealed book, and finally led the Church to believe that Bible-reading was much too perilous a business for ordinary lay-people to engage in. It is an irony of the time that sanction for such an attitude was found in allegorising the story given in [Exodus 19](#): Mount Sinai represents Scripture, and the laymen who accidentally or presumptuously trespasses on the Holy Mount shall die.⁴ [p. 301](#)

The medieval Schoolmen's patterns of preaching, moreover, became incredibly complex, with all manner of ramifications, divisions and sub-divisions, showing a punctiliousness that to the modern mind is not only artificial but ludicrous.⁵ T. H. L. Parker comments, remarkably, that 'some writers regard the Schoolmen as saviours of the sermon, in that they free it from the bondage (!) of the homily. But the form they gave it

² Dargan, *History of Preaching*, vol. 1, p.65.

³ Broadus, *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, p.61.

⁴ J. S. McEwan, *The Faith of John Knox*, pp.32, 33.

⁵ See C. Smyth, *The Art of Preaching*, for an extended treatment of scholastic preaching.

was far more rigid and artificial, and not so well suited to the purpose of preaching'; and he goes on to quote from C. Smyth, 'Such preaching may be clever and ingenious, but its connection with the Word of God, though undeniable, is purely superficial and purely formal. There is in here no wrestling with the Word, no preaching as of a dying man to dying men. The text from Scripture is supposed to be the preacher's theme: it is in fact merely the peg on which he hangs an academic exercise'.⁶ It is scarcely surprising that such a pattern became increasingly unacceptable and powerless. Its decay was inevitable; it had the touch of death.

3. ROOTS OF REFORMATION PREACHING

The time of the Reformation saw a marked, indeed fundamental, change. The antecedents of the movement that was destined to revolutionize the whole of Europe go as far back as Wyclif and his Lollard bands, who initiated what Dargen calls 'that wave of mighty reformatory preaching' in the later part of the fourteenth century. It was Wyclif who first departed decisively from the mediaeval pattern, both in form and content, returning to the homily and making preaching once again, as in the patristic age, the exposition of the Scriptures. It was this noble heritage that was passed on, through John Hus to Luther and other Reformers, and that became, under God, the foundation of the Reformation. It was an idea whose hour had come; for Wyclif's Lollards travelled the length and breadth of England, spreading the message of the gospel and making known the Word of God to the common people through the use of Wyclif's translation of the Scriptures into the English language. It was a movement that gathered momentum and became ultimately irresistible, and the Reformation became a glorious fact, setting the whole of Europe aflame with its liberating message of grace.

The transformation in preaching was astonishing. It would not be too much to say that it came into its own in a way that had not been p. 302 known since the fifth century. It is certainly no accident that Chrysostom and Augustine were the fathers to whom the Reformers looked back with great approval, and they unquestionably stand in the early tradition. As Parker says, 'the Gospel is a return through Augustine to the New Testament; the form is a return to the homily of the Fathers'.⁷

But while it may be true that it was Luther who first 'rediscovered both the form and the substance of this preaching' (Parker), it was supremely in the Reformed, as distinct from the Lutheran, tradition that the continuous exposition of Scripture, brought into its own by Origen and into its fullest flowering by Chrysostom and Augustine, found its fullest expression and reached its greatest heights. The output of the Reformers was prodigious, and makes it clear just what a central place preaching now had in the life of the Church. Calvin and Zwingli in particular, with Bullinger following them, preached continuously through books of the Bible, often in the greatest detail. Dargen points out that Bullinger's biographer "enumerates as having come down from the eighteen years following 1549 one hundred sermons on the book of Revelation, sixty six on Daniel, one hundred and seventy on Jeremiah, one hundred and ninety on Isaiah", and that in the first ten years of his ministry he had gone through nearly all the books of the Bible, matching Calvin himself in the comprehensiveness of his biblical coverage.

The implications of this revolution can hardly be over-estimated. With the preaching of the Word being recognized as the primary task of the ministry, preaching resumed its

⁶ C. Smyth, *The Art of Preaching*, p.53.

⁷ T. H. L. Parker, *The Oracles of God*, p.20.

proper place in worship; the Mass was ‘dethroned from its usurped reign in the Church’, and ‘the pulpit, instead of the altar became the central point’ in the Reformed churches: “Preaching was bound to the Scriptures, both in form and in substance. The purpose of preaching, the Reformers said, was to lay bare and interpret the Word of God in Scripture. Hence they set up the Scripture as the criterion by which all their preaching must be judged.”⁸ Preaching became more prominent in worship than it had been since the fourth century. Luther, indeed, maintained that preaching is the most important part of worship, an attitude well illustrated by the following quotation from his Table Talk:

“I am sure and certain, when I go up to the pulpit to preach or read, that it is not my word I speak, but that my tongue is the pen of a ready writer, as the Psalmist has it. God speaks in the prophets and men of God, as St. Peter in his epistle says: The holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy p.303 Ghost. Therefore we must not separate of part God and man, according to our natural reason or understanding. In like manner every hearer must say: I hear not St. Paul, St. Peter, or man speak, but God himself.”

We must now turn our attention to two matters in particular which have a direct bearing on our theme, both integrally related, and emerging from what has been said: (i) the basic presuppositions underlying the essential need felt by the Reformers to make a clean break with the mediaeval scholastic form of preaching and return to the earlier, patristic model, the expository homily; and (ii) the Reformed doctrine of preaching itself.

4. REFORMED DOCTRINE OF PERSPICUITY

Over against the situation that obtained in the mediaeval Church, in which the Bible had become a sealed book,—for the reasons graphically expressed by Pope Innocent III about the year 1210, “No doubt it is a laudable thing that a man should aspire to study for himself the oracles of God in Scripture. But the task is so difficult, the possibilities of error so great, and the consequences of error so terrible, that no man should embark on such study unless he has prepared himself for it by a thorough training in theology”—the Reformers resolutely believed and taught the essential *perspicuity* or intelligibility of Scripture to the ordinary spiritual mind. John Knox’s words to Mary, Queen of Scots make this point well:

“The Word of God is plain in itself; and if there appear any obscurity in one place, the Holy Ghost, who is never contrary to Himself, explains the same more clearly in other places: so that there can remain no doubt, but to such as remain obstinately ignorant”.¹

Elsewhere, in *A Most Wholesome Counsel*, written in July 1556 to his brethren in Scotland ‘touching the daily exercise of God’s most holy and sacred Word’, Knox speaks of the need to study widely, reading whole books at a time—‘ever ending such books as ye begin (as the time will suffer)’—and to ‘join some books of the Old, and some of the New Testament together; as Genesis and one of the Evangelists, Exodus with another, and so forth.... Be frequent in the Prophets, and the Epistles of St. Paul, for the multitude of matters most comfortable therein contained requireth exercise and a good memory’. And he adds:

“For it shall greatly comfort you, to hear that harmony and well-tuned song of the Holy Spirit speaking in our fathers from the beginning. It shall confirm you in these dangerous

⁸ T. H. L. Parker, *The Oracles of God*, p.21.

¹ Dargan, *History of Preaching*, vol. 1, p.63.

and perilous days, to behold the face of [p. 304](#) Christ Jesus' loving Spouse and Kirk from Abel to Himself, and from Himself to this day, in all ages to be on."⁹

Here, as J. S. McEwen points out,¹⁰ we have, admirably stated, the essentials of the Reformed doctrine of the *perspicuitas* of Scripture. He adds

"The Bible is not a rag-bag of assorted proof-texts, as the mediaeval church had made it: it is a unity of revelation, and is to be read in the light of the revelation which it, itself, communicates. Take it where you will, it tells—chapter after chapter—the one story of God's unfolding plan of redemption. Isolated sentences torn from their context, may well be unintelligible or even misleading; but their meaning will become plain when they are read as parts of that great story. Therefore read widely to learn the story, before reading narrowly to elucidate the meaning of single texts."

It is true that in the above-mentioned *Wholesome Counsel* Knox is referring to the reading of the Scriptures; but this does not mean, and Knox does not suggest, that the man in the pew can dispense with the man in the pulpit.

"Knox is well aware that the ordinary believer may have neither the time nor the ability to reach that conspectus of all Scripture which is essential to a balanced interpretation of the Faith in its wholeness, for the well-being of the Church and of the individual believers who require to hear the Word in its wholeness for their edification in the faith, the labours of trained exegetom theologian and skilled preacher are essential.

But the *perspicuitas* of Scripture did mean this: that the way-faring men, though fools, would meet their God in the Bible, hear His voice, take His promises and comforts and rebukes personally and directly to themselves, and understand enough of what was being said to them to receive, by faith, salvation."¹¹

The profound significance of all this can scarcely be exaggerated, in relation to the Reformer's adoption of, or rather reversion to, the continuous exposition of Scripture practised in the early centuries of the Christian era. On the one hand—and this was particularly true at the time of the Reformation—there was a clamant need for a knowledge of the Scriptures to be imparted to the common people. They had been denied it for so long, and now men were hungry for the Word of life. How else could that knowledge be imparted, except by the most comprehensive exposition of all its parts? On the other hand—and [p. 305](#) this is even more basic and fundamental—the Reformers maintained that Christ and the Scriptures were inseparable, in the sense that it is only in and through the Scriptures that Christ can be known. Therefore to communicate a whole Christ and mediate a whole salvation, a whole Bible is necessary, for Christ is in the Scriptures. 'Search and Scriptures', said our Lord, 'for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and *they are they which testify of Me* ([John 5:39](#)).

It can hardly be controverted that in respect to both these considerations, the wheel has come round full circle; for today, there is a widespread ignorance of the Scriptures throughout the land, and—thankfully—a growing awareness of the need for a presentation of the message of the whole biblical revelation with a view to the production of balanced and mature Christian character in the lives of God's people.

⁹ Knox, *History*, vol. 2, p.18.

¹⁰ Knox, *Select Writings*, p.178.

¹¹ J. S. McEwan, *The Faith of John Knox*, particularly the Chapter on 'The Bible and the Holy Spirit', to which the material in this section is indebted.

5. THE PREACHED WORD OF GOD

(ii) The indissoluble bond between Christ and the Scriptures has significance for the Reformers' doctrine of preaching also, for indeed this one the corollary of the other. T. H. L. Parker discusses this at some length in a fine chapter of his book on Calvin,¹² and sums up the distinctive characteristics of the great Reformer's position.

Preaching is the Word of God, first, in the sense that it is an exposition and interpretation of the Bible, which is as much the word of God as if men 'heard the very words pronounced by God himself'. Secondly, preaching is the Word of God because the preacher has been sent and commissioned by God as His ambassador, the one who has authority to speak in His name. Thirdly, preaching is the Word of God in the sense that it is Revelation. It is the Word of God when God speaks through the human words, revealing Himself through them and using them as the vehicle of His grace. To use Calvin's own words, "He deigns to consecrate the mouths and tongues of men to His service, making His own voice to be heard in them";¹³ and "Whenever God is pleased to bless their labour, He makes their doctrine efficacious by the power of His Spirit; and the voice which is in itself mortal, is made an instrument to communicate eternal life".¹⁴ It is not so much that Calvin *identifies* the spoken, human word with the living Word of God—the distinction between the two is always there—but rather that he recognizes that God is pleased to speak in the word that [p.306](#) is preached, as indeed is made clear in the important passage in [Acts 10:44](#): "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all of them that heard the word." In other words, the Holy Spirit is given in the preaching of the Word (i.e. when true preaching takes place, for it can never be taken for granted, as a matter of course, that this anointing takes place every time a man chooses to speak forth the truth of the gospel—orthodoxy of doctrine of itself does not guarantee the unction of the Spirit), making the word spoken a living word from on high that creates faith, mediates forgiveness and newness of life.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR EVERY PREACHER

There are two necessary corollaries or implications of this doctrine of preaching. One is that it is the preaching, rather than the preacher, that is of decisive importance, the message rather than the man. Far from 'new presbyter' being 'old priest writ large', a familiar enough accusation, he is in fact the 'servant of the Word', and it is the Word, not the man, that makes the impact and accomplishes the work of grace in men's lives. This is of greater significance than is often realized. If the gospel were, of course, simply a story to relate, then the important consideration *would be* the preacher—his style, his presentation, his oratory. But if it *is*, as the Apostles and Reformers held, the power of God unto salvation, and not *simply* something attended by the power of God, then the emphasis necessarily passes from the preacher to the thing preached, and from the 'excellency of speech' and the 'enticing words of man's wisdom' to the message that comes 'in demonstration of the Spirit and of power'.

The other corollary of the biblical doctrine of preaching is that since it is God that speaks to men in the proclamation of the Word, no man, however spiritually mature or

¹² McEwen, *The Faith of John Knox*, pp.35, 36.

¹³ T. H. L. Parker, *The Oracles of God*, p.45–64.

¹⁴ Institutes, IV 1:5.

sanctified, is ever in a position where He does not need that ministry to submit himself in obedience to it. As Calvin puts it,

“We see that the most learned need to be taught, the most upright and the most righteous have need to be admonished. If God has already put us on the good road and bestowed upon us the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we must not think that preaching is now unnecessary for us, for we must be led right up to the end, since our perfection is not in this world”.¹⁵

T. H. L. Parker quotes from one of Calvin’s sermons on Deuteronomy to illustrate the kind of authority preaching has and the duty of obedience that it lays on those who hear it: p. 307

“It is especially said ‘The people has been rebellious against the mouth of God’. And how is that? It is not narrated that God appeared visibly, or that a voice was heard from heaven. No, it was Moses who had spoken it, it was a man who said that the people resisted the mouth of God. So we see how God wishes His Word to be received in such humility when He sends men to declare what He commands them, as if He were in the midst of us. The doctrine, then, which is put forward in the name of God, ought to be as authoritative as if all the Angels of Heaven descended to us, as if God Himself had revealed His majesty before our eyes. In this way He wished to test the obedience of our faith.”¹⁶

A greater appreciation of this important truth would surely serve to deliver the people of God from the cardinal error of confusing the proclamation of the Word of God with an exercise in public speaking to be assessed, judged, criticized and even patronized, instead of accepted humbly and joyfully in a spirit of obedience and submission as a word from on high. The Apostle Paul says it all in his memorable words to the Thessalonians:

“For this cause thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the Word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”¹⁷

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From the Third World: A New Approach to Theological Education

Irene W. Foulkes

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¹⁵ Commentary on 1 Peter 1:25.

¹⁶ Corpus Reformatorum, xxv, p.638.

¹⁷ 1 Thess. 2:13.

With the term 'Christian higher education' we usually refer to university level programs that require at least secondary education as a requirement for entrance. In regard to the quality factor in Christian education this is very often equated with a high academic level, extensive library holdings, and a concentration of professors and students dedicated to full-time study or teaching. Such requirements forcibly limit us to a very small portion of the potential leaders of the church. This is especially true in the Third World, where the number of people who qualify for this kind of higher education necessarily represent an elite, and the financing required further reduces the number of candidates who can be served. Either consciously or unconsciously, however, the goal toward which theological education has evolved over many decades in the developing world has been precisely this type of model. We see this in our own institution in Central America, the Latin American Biblical Seminary, as our academic level has evolved upward over the last decades. This movement is paralleled by many other institutions in our area and the rest of the Third World. We must ask ourselves whether the criteria that have moved us in this direction are primarily imported standards that we have accepted uncritically. Not only those of us who originally came from the so-called developed world may have been uncritical on this score, but also our Latin American, African, or Asian colleagues who would not have an 'inferior' type of training imposed on them but wished also to gain access to Christian higher education, with a view to reproducing it through local institutions.

LATIN AMERICAN REALITIES

Antedating the recent theological flowering in Latin America there was another kind of flowering from the same root, a root that we can define as a re-thinking and re-elaboration of our Christian heritage from within the framework of Latin American realities. By Christian heritage we refer either to theology proper or, in the case we will take up now, theological education and its flowering in the extension movement. **P. 309**

In Latin America we have become aware that our church situation is radically different from the church situation in North America or Europe; churches here will never represent in the midst of this society what the established Protestant church does in Europe and North America. That model is simply not applicable in our situation. Briefly put, the Protestant church in Latin America is a church of the poor. That ten per cent or so of the population that comprises the Protestant church is found primarily among the rural or urban working classes, which occupy a much lower section of the socio-economic spectrum than relatively well-off blue-collar workers in the North. This church grows, propagates itself, instructs itself, and celebrates its faith with the help of ad hoc ministers, people who in other areas of the world might be called lay leaders.

Let's note a few pertinent facts about this state of affairs. First, these leaders perform the functions of ministry. They mobilize, organize, and accompany the members of the church in their different activities. More significantly, they are the ones responsible for interpreting what Christian faith means, for preaching it and for instructing the body of Christ. Growing out of the economic condition of the churches is a second fact: these leaders, in order to obtain adequate education and training for their task, cannot be separated from their total life situation. For the most part the churches do not have the resources to send them to a seminary. Even where a church is located in the same city as a seminary, there are not the resources necessary for a number of people to study full-time nor to support them afterwards as full-time ministers on a professional level.

A third fact: seminaries have never been able to provide enough ministers for the growing number of congregations. Perhaps we should also add that theologically the traditional pattern of pastoral training might not be the most appropriate for the Latin

American situation. The Protestant church in Latin America, as the Body of Christ, incarnates His presence among the poor. It is not the mission of theological education to demand a social evolution of its leaders into the middle or upper strata of society by following the residential school model, but rather to equip them to serve this church of the poor by providing in-service training for church leaders actively engaged on the congregational level.

THE ORIGIN OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION BY EXTENSION IN GUATEMALA

Gifted theological educators were present in one of the principal denominations of Guatemala in the 1960s. As they analyzed the **P. 310** church situation, they realized that their small theological institution, with rather high academic requirements and located in the capital city, was simply irrelevant as far as the leadership needs of the church were concerned. It had not produced in its many years of existence more than a handful of ministers capable of inserting themselves into the local churches, of living with the people and ministering there in a meaningful way. They had effectively been educated out of their original context. Yet the church maintained its life and grew with an absence of trained ministers. An analysis of the dynamics of church life and growth indicated that natural leaders, gifted by the Holy Spirit, would arise in each congregation and carry out, sometimes rather inadequately, the functions of ministry necessary for the ongoing life of the church. A new model of theological education was called for if these people were to be served, and through them their churches. The policy of cutting ministerial candidates off from their base and transferring them to a residential seminary had already been tried and found wanting. These theological educators concluded that they must reverse the process. Theological education was to be taken to those who had proved their capability and calling. They should have the opportunity to study Scripture, theology, church history and pastoral subjects within their communities and in relation to their ministry. The seminary must extend itself to them rather than bring them in to the seminary. Theological education by extension was born.

In the classic extension model first developed in Guatemala, a central institution fans out into local centres, churches, in the person of its professors. Classes are held one day a week, related to materials provided for individual study between class meetings. The students continue their regular employment and regular church activities, thus bringing to their study the vitality of total immersion in their ministerial situation. The logic of this approach was almost immediately evident to church leaders and theological educators, especially those on the middle level academically throughout Latin America. As the Guatemala experiment began to be publicized, imitators sprang up everywhere. Theological education by extension has now been recreated hundreds of times not only in Latin America but throughout the Third World and, in recent years, also in the developed countries.

LIBERATION OR DOMESTICATION?

Theological education by extension (TEE) is not a panacea nor much less is it automatically an adequate response to the demands of the church of the poor. TEE has often been conceived of simply as traditional **P. 311** pastoral training of whatever level, carried out in a new framework, a new methodological situation—traditional theological education *in* a situation of poverty. By contrast, theological education by extension can

also be conceived of as an enabling education *for* a context of poverty. There is a world of difference between the two concepts.

In the first there is a new delivery system, a methodological adaptation but not an educational alternative. There are instances where TEE programs reproduce, more efficiently perhaps, a curriculum of indoctrination or domestication. TEE is a more economical way to indoctrinate. In contrast, real theological education must take into account the total context of the learners—their own poverty and their own ability to create, to change, to develop, to be God's instruments for the building of a church in the midst of desperate conditions. Unfortunately, in the rush to create TEE programs, teaching materials have been produced with inadequate pedagogical and theological criteria, not for dialogue and growth or the assuming of responsibility for learning and for creative ministry, but just the opposite—for producing parrots, through a simplistic presentation of theological and Biblical issues that are anything but simple. In the face of this distortion many educators have justifiably questioned the whole TEE movement, asking whether such reductionism is inherent in the methodology itself.

On the other hand, if we conceive of TEE as theological education *for* a context of poverty, that is, a new methodology that goes beyond effective delivery of a content, then we realize that we must approach the task from the bottom—from the church of the poor and its natural leaders, its only leaders. We must approach the task then from the church itself, rather than from the point of view of an institution that seeks to deliver a prepackaged program. We must view the objectives and the content of theological education, as well as its methodology, from the standpoint of the lay ministers' situation as an integral part of their churches and communities. These ad hoc pastors are *the* agents of the church, its development, change, and growth. Content and methodology together must produce a combination of study, action, and reflection that will incorporate pastoral and community activities as part of the learning process.

We can picture the situation of the extension student as a triangle. At one angle stands the student himself as a person, usually a fairly mature person who has come to a position of responsibility and leadership through the selection processes of the life of the church. Another point of the triangle represents the church, the believing [p. 312](#) community in which this person functions. The third point of the triangle stands for the neighbourhood, town, or city in which the church is located and which it must serve in an integral way. The student must develop a critical consciousness regarding himself as a person, a minister, and a community agent. His critical consciousness will also focus on the church, its life and its mission, its message. It is particularly important that the minister-student also learn to think critically about the community and its problems, and work out the relation of the church's message and mission to society and its needs.

For this type of education to take place, the ministerial student must be enabled to bring experience into vital interaction with course materials provided by the theological program. He needs tools for analysis—analysis of Scripture, of his theological heritage, and also of his environment, the socio-economic and cultural setting of his congregation in the local community and the national scene. He needs tools for dialog and involvement in these areas. In relation to traditional subject areas, for example, a course on the Gospels will require the student of a contextualized theological education by extension to study the trial of Jesus in the light of the power structures of Jewish society in the first century. He will then reflect on the passion story together with his congregation in relation to power structures in his own context, working through the concept of institutionalized injustice and Christian responses to repression.

An integrated course of study of this type aims to enable the student to acquire the tools that will open up Scripture and the circumstances in which its events were played

out, and at the same time to acquire the tools to analyze the present situation in which the life of the church and Christian witness are lived out.

Innovatively contextualized theological education can be developed on every academic level; the particular scholastic level chosen by a specific program will be determined by the target group of ad hoc pastors. Even on the university level (and there are many leaders functioning as pastors who have managed to reach this level), quality in Christian higher education will be determined not so much by the traditional canons mentioned at the beginning of this article, but by the relevance of program content and methodology, and the demand for excellence in independent study and community involvement that it places on the student. This means both a new way of doing theology and a new way of doing theological education. [p. 313](#)

POSTSCRIPT: WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The most pertinent and Comprehensive volume on the subject is *The Extension Movement in Theological Education*, by F. Ross Kinsler, revised edition, 1981, published by the William Carey Library, South Pasadena, California. It bears the subtitle 'A Call to Renewal of the Ministry,' an indication that the book deals not only with method or educational theory, but is intimately related to the study of what ministry in the church means today in the Third World—and in the developed world as well.

A constant up-date on innovative theological education world-wide is provided by *Ministerial Formation*, a bulletin published by the Program on Theological Education, World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland. The purpose of this quarterly newsletter is to encourage sharing and co-operation among people working for the renewal of the church's program of ministerial formation.

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Book Reviews

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Exegesis and Interpretation

DARKNESS AND LIGHT: AN EXPOSITION OF EPHESIANS 4:17 TO 5:17

by D. M. Lloyd-Jones

(Banner of Truth, Edinburgh 1982)

Pp.460, £8.95

Abstract of a review by Paul D. Gardner in *Evangel* October 1983.

This volume completes the publication of a series of expository sermons on Ephesians, preached by Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones at Westminster Chapel, London. Like other volumes in the series it is replete with careful exegesis, and rendered with the fervour and passion of one called by God to preach his Word. For those who usually only preach 'topically', here is a volume that will introduce you to the great potential of expository sermons on texts. For others who do attempt preaching like this, the Doctor's use of the rest of the Bible in support of arguments is well worth noting, both for the way it can educate a congregation and for the way it demonstrates a clear belief in the unity of Scripture.

Also to be noted is the way in which each sermon contains the Gospel message (e.g. pp.48, 58, 352ff, 365, etc.). This appeal comes with deep compassion for the sinner, but maintains an honest and realistic description of his plight. How good it is to hear the regular, consistent and challenging appeal for repentance and faith! How glorious the Gospel *really* is when set against a truthful description of man's sinfulness.

We would all do well to examine how the Doctor was able to teach doctrine from Scripture consistently and, usually, without undue distortion of the text. The application of the text to the modern world however does leave something to be desired. It is not that the author failed to apply the text in his preaching. He even says that no application 'is a contradiction of the Scriptures' (p. 16).

Rather the applications are, so often, too general, referring to the general condition of man rather than to a specific modern example. While the Holy Spirit undoubtedly applies God's Word to the individual's life, a personal and direct application does not come amiss in an age that thinks mainly in concrete terms.

Undoubtedly there are areas of teaching in these sermons that are highly controversial among Evangelical ministers. Some will have questions about his methodology in which, on occasion, a true and [p. 316](#) vital point is made, but on the poorest of textual evidence. Is it really legitimate to discuss the nature of evangelistic meetings, and the manner in which one comes to Christ, under the text of [Eph. 4:21](#)?

If this style of detailed expository teaching is similar to your own there is surely much still to learn from this series on Ephesians, as long as it is remembered that congregations and their needs differ. Let us learn while remembering that we no longer live in the late fifties and that we do not all minister to congregations as erudite as that found in Westminster Chapel!

If you are not acquainted with careful preaching of this nature then do read these sermons, for your preaching and understanding of Ephesians will surely be the better for it.

Faith and Church

EASTER ENIGMA

by John Wenham
(Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1984)
Pp. 162, £2.95

Reviewed by Francis Foulkes.

The basic question this book tackles is, 'Do the Resurrection stories contradict one another?' and despite many scholarly answers in the affirmative, John Wenham would respond with a firm 'No'. His work is careful and painstaking—if sometimes, of necessity, speculative and imaginative—in its analysis of the resurrection narratives. He begins with a consideration of the geographical setting (Jerusalem itself and Bethany), of the principal actors in the drama, of the five writers (the four evangelists and the apostle Paul) and then of the events of Good Friday, Saturday, Easter Day and the succeeding days. He grasps the nettle of such questions as the expectation of resurrection appearances in Galilee (according to [Matthew 28:7](#) and [Mark 16:7](#)) and the actual appearances in Jerusalem in the first eight days (according to [John 20](#)). Not all will be equally convinced of every part of the reconstruction of events proposed and the roles of the different individuals involved. Sometimes where John Wenham says 'probably' we might prefer to say 'possibly', as when he identifies Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany and ascribes the two anointings to the same person at different times. It is fair to say that there is nothing impossible in the proposed outline of events and at least Wenham is justified in saying p. 317 that 'the charge of irreconcilability brought against the resurrection stories has not been proved' (p.124). Of some variations in the narratives, such as between one angel and two at the tomb, he is surely right in saying, 'It needs to be remembered that we are dealing with two *descriptions* of an event, and not with two witnesses replying to cross-examination' (p.87). By the same token, he perhaps does not make sufficient of the evidential strength of there being in the Gospels four narratives that agree on the central facts—of the risen Lord, the empty tomb, the effect on the disciples—while being clearly independent one of another in the details they present.

MARTIN LUTHER: PROPHET TO THE CHURCH CATHOLIC

by James Atkinson
(Exeter, Paternoster Press, 1983)
Pp.226, £6.80

Reviewed by Francis Foulkes.

This book is no biography of Luther, but, as a volume written at the time of the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's birth, an assessment of the man and his message, and in

particular, of the relevance of his message for the whole Church today. He begins with two chapters entitled, 'Catholic Devaluation of Luther, 1517–1939: The period of hostility and destructive criticism' and 'Catholic Revaluation of Luther, 1939–1983: The period of respect and interest'.

Atkinson then considers Luther's significance as 'reformer and prophet', defending him against the charges of 'individualism' and 'subjectivism' (p.78). Luther's great discovery—though not to be attributed to his own seeking, but the seeking grace of God—was the fundamental significance for Christianity of personal relationship with God. It was this that was at stake and not doctrinal formulations, as such, in the controversies of the Reformation days. It is this relationship, Atkinson argues, that the Church today, Catholic and Protestant alike, has to relearn from the message of Luther.

From this 'Fundamental Religious Experience' (ch.5) as base, Professor Atkinson goes on in his five remaining chapters to show how all of the other emphases found in Luther derive their meaning:

(a) Because personal relationship with God is possible and available to the believer, 'the general priesthood of believers' must take precedence over any thought of ministerial or sacerdotal priesthood.

(b) Justification by faith means that 'salvation is based solely on the p. 318 righteousness of Christ, by grace alone, by faith alone. Compared with Christ's work of infinite righteousness, the active righteousness of all men, the sufferings of all the martyrs and the good works of the saints, are nothing' (p.115).

(c) The source of understanding of this relationship with God is the Bible and thus it must stand above all the tradition and formulations of the Church. God speaks to men and women 'making clear his power, authority, certainty, and deep concern' through the Bible. But the 'experience of the living God' is of supreme importance, the Book a means to that end (p.162).

(d) Christ is utterly central for Luther; as he puts it, 'the one doctrine which I have supremely at heart, is that of faith in Christ, from whom, through whom and unto whom all my theological thinking flows back and forth, day and night' (p.173).

(e) His concept of the Church is not so much the 'invisible' over against the 'visible', but the dynamic reality of the people of God in and through whom 'Christ lives, works, and rules through his redeeming grace, and the Holy Spirit operates through his sanctifying, renewing power' (p. 195).

Such a summary cannot do justice to Atkinson's fine presentation of the central message of Luther. It is a book to be read and pondered, for Atkinson rightly says that we all have much to learn and relearn from Luther. If I have any quarrel with the book, it is with a tendency to see Luther without reckoning sufficiently with his human weaknesses and with the writer's readiness to make such a claim as that Luther 'preached the Gospel more boldly and effectively than any other man' (pp.68f.). He well represents the great reformer as 'always quick to defend Christianity, but never himself' (p.7), and in the last analysis Atkinson is not concerned to magnify Luther, but to say that 'the Gospel tones of his prophetic voice will ring down all the ages' (p.39).

Ethics and Society

CHRISTIANITY AND MARXISM

Edited by Alan Scarfe & Patrick Sookdeo

(Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1982)

Pp. 186, £4.20

Reviewed by Bruce J. Nicholls.

Patrick Sookdeo introduces us to seven essays on different aspects of [p. 319](#) the religious significance of Marxism and its relationship to Christianity in theory and practice. A book offering a balanced critique of spirituality in global marxism from an evangelical perspective is timely and welcomed for its fresh insights into the motivation and actions of marxist governments towards Christians.

George Paterson surveys marxism as a twentieth century quasi-religion and the reasons for the early Marx's goal of changing human nature. His chapter contrasting Mao Tse-tung's policies for spiritual transformation with those of traditional marxism is helpful in understanding events in modern China. Alan Scarfe discusses the religious policies of Eurocommunism, the Soviets and the eastern bloc, China and communist parties in Latin America. He describes their dilemma since Christian churches are experiencing revival and not withering away and in the face of growing human rights movements. Kathleen Carter recounts the methods of the Soviet Union to persuade, pressurize and persecute Christians. A sympathetic look at the marxist analysis of alienation and poverty in Latin America is provided by Chris Sugden. He discusses the failure of western developmentalism and seeks to evaluate the Latin American 'Christians for Socialism' movement and their theory of liberation. David Lyon's use of the concepts of suppression and substitution in evaluating the marxist doctrines of man and praxis is very helpful in understanding the Christian-marxist dialogue. Tony Pearce concludes with a personal testimony of his pilgrimage from marxism to Christianity.

This book has the strengths and weaknesses of a collection of essays. Although it does not take us into the era of the post-Mao Communist Party in China or the impact of a Polish Pope, it is well worth reading and highly recommended for those wanting to understand the complexities of contemporary marxist approaches to the Christian religion. [p. 320](#)

Journal Information

Publications Referred to in This Issue

Bulletin

Published by the International Council for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education, P.O. Box 133, Sioux Centre, Iowa 51250, USA, twice until 1984. It is being sent, free of charge, to 2300 scholars and educators in 60 countries. The Council will decide about its future publication in due course.

Evangel

A Quarterly Review of Biblical Practical and Contemporary Theology, Rutherford House, 17 Calremont Park, Edinburgh EH6 7PJ Scotland. Rates: £4.25, \$12,00 (4 issues).

The Mennonite Quarterly

Published by Goshen College, Goshen IN 46526, U.S.A. Subscription: US \$12.00 (4 times).

Missionalia

Published by the Southern African Missiological Society, 31 Fourteenth Street, Menlo Park, 0081 Pretoria, South Africa, thrice annually. Subscription: US \$12.00 p.a.

Taiwan Church Growth Bulletin

Published by the Taiwan Church Growth Society, P.O. Box 27–50, Taipei, Taiwan R.O.C. 104.

Theological Fraternity Bulletin

Published by the Latin American Theological Fraternity, Ave Plutarco E Calles No. 1962, Col Prado, Mexico 13, D.F. (four times).

Themelios

Published by the British Theological Students Fellowship, 38 De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7GP, England or TSF, 233 Langdon, Madison, Wisconsin 53703 USA. Rates: £6, 50 (5 issues).